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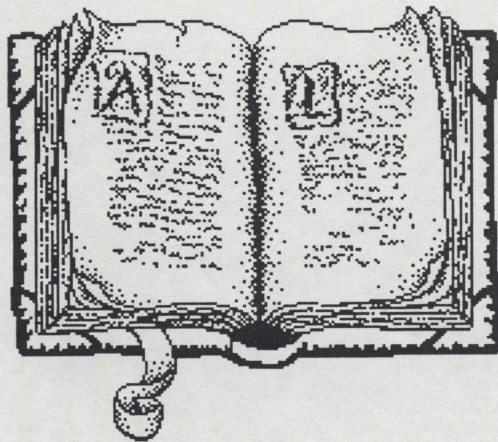
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*My Own Recollections
of
World War II*

by

Bernhard Storch



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Dedication

This is my own account from World War Two, dedicated to my children, Gita Helen and Larry Gerald, and their families, in memory of my parents, my three brothers, my grandparents, all my relatives, all my cousins, my schoolmates and friends, who perished in the Holocaust during World War Two. And to all the men and women who fought so heroically to defeat the Nazi regime.

*Your father, Bernhard Storch
April 4, 1985
New City, N.Y. 10956*



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Bernhard Storch

1922 to 1939.

I was born in a small city, population twenty thousand people, of whom three thousand were Jews. The rest of the population was Catholic. Geographically this city is located in the southern part of Poland. The nearest large city is the historic city of Krakow, the capital of this region, only 33 km. away. The big well-known attraction throughout Europe was and still is a salt mine, the second largest in Europe. The legend has it that this mine was discovered by a Polish queen, Jadwiga. A beautiful chapel carved from salt was there at the bottom of the mine. Besides the mine there were all kinds of small industries, wine breweries, agriculture farms, cattle and horses were raised near by. As for education, we had three public schools, two high schools, two colleges, and one seminary. There were also two military regiments and all kinds of retail shops and factories. This city is located on a hillside, circled by a river and large forests.

So far as I remember growing up was real fun. I had four brothers. The oldest was Joseph; he was two years older than me. I do not have a photograph of him, but I will never forget his face. He was good looking, blond with blue eyes, and tall for his age. Very bright and excellent in every subject in school. So it was very sad when he passed away in my arms on a Friday in March of 1932 at 11 a.m. As I remember he got injured on the way home from school, falling from a horse-drawn sled, injuring his spine, and developing tuberculosis. That was a terrible shock and loss to the whole family, especially the children who watched him die. My second brother's name was Dudek, or David. He was born December 6, 1924, very handsome, tall for his age. He had black hair and blue eyes, also excellent in school, very popular and bright. He used to tutor other kids after school. We were very close and he is still in my memory. My third brother was born June 10, 1927. His name was Wilek, or William. He was blond with curly hair and blue eyes, very pretty little boy. He was left-handed. In Europe being left-handed was a small disaster because you were not permitted to write with your left hand in school. Of course, my parents tried to discourage him, and it was very hard for this poor child. Then, he also had the habit to suck on his finger, and this created another situation. We really had to pity him, and he was so adorable. My youngest brother's name was Leon. He was born July 15, 1931. He was blond with brown eyes and everyone loved him. After all, he was the youngest. The last time I saw him he was eight years old.

As far as I remember there were no animosities between ourselves, and I do not recall any black eyes or broken bones. Well, it was safe to play outside those days for all ages, and parents did not fear to let them go and be by themselves. Children were preoccupied with making their own toys and inventing their own games. We were fortunate to have a river nearby, the Raba, which merged into the largest river in Poland, the River Wisla. So in the summer there was swimming and fishing, and in the winter ice skating and hockey. I was very good in soccer, and always managed to be on my school's first team. So as you can see, as children growing up was a lot of fun.

As for our parents, that was another story. Life was very hard for them, especially from 1933 to the end. My father lost lots of business investments, and it was a real struggle from then on. But there was a large family on my mother's side, so when the going was rough they always pitched in if necessary and helped each other out. European life was completely different than in the U.S.A., and to my knowledge there was no welfare, and families always helped each other out. We had a beautiful family, lots of friends, good neighbors, when tragedy struck again. My father got very ill, and after seven months he passed away from lung illness or cancer. My mother, my grandfather, Uncle David, myself, and a physician were at his side, and the time was 6 a.m. on a Tuesday, three weeks before the High Holidays in 1937. He was then forty-three years old. It was a very large funeral, a lot of people from both sides of the religion, because my father was well-liked by everybody and everyone came to pay him their last respects. During World War One he served as an officer in the Austrian Army. He was seriously wounded through the lungs. You could always see the spot when he took off his shirt. He was highly decorated for his bravery and as children we admired his medals. So it was a terrible shock for my mother to overcome this tragedy, and of course for the children and the whole family.

When I graduated from public school I immediately started to apprentice as a plumber, 45 kilometers away from home. I traveled each morning by train starting at 6 a.m. to the large city of Tarnow, but after three months I had to give up that profession because it was just too hard for me. In the evening you had to continue with your education three times a week. Upon coming to myself, Uncle Moniek persuaded my mother to send me to him, and live with him, his wife Lena, and their little daughter Rose, who was one year old. By the way Aunt Lena was Uncle Robert's youngest sister. Lena, Moniek, and Rose did not survive the war. So from October 1937 to September 1939 I lived in Silesia, some 130 kilometers away from home, or three and a half hours away by train. At times I was very lonely and very sad. That was the first time I had left home and I missed them all very much.

1939-1945

September 1, 1939. I was awakened in the middle of the night with a lot of activities outside, and there I was all by myself, in this large apartment, at the age of sixteen. There was no one to turn to for advice because all my relatives were on vacation. We suspected something the day before, and I was prepared for the worst. On August 30 I saw six German soldiers captured and marched through the city streets. For days the city government was busy packing and moving mountains of boxes out of the city. The city is Chorzow. Before the Silesia Revolution in 1922 it was named Koenigshutte. It was a large industrial center whose main product was coal and steel, and this city was located three miles from the German border. This region was much fought over, both for its riches and its location. At this time my object was to leave this home, which belonged to Uncle Moniek and his family. They were vacationing and visiting my mother and grandparents some 130 kilometers away. I was apprenticed to my uncle, a master tailor with an excellent business employing about half a dozen people. In Europe you had to apprentice for three years. At home was my mother and my three brothers, Dudek, age fourteen, Wilek, age twelve, and Leon age eight. I was sixteen.

At that time I was in charge of the entire place and I had to make a decision in a hurry. There was a lot of military activity and lack of transportation. I could not get in touch with my uncle, all phone lines were busy or disrupted. I telephoned the railroad station in Katowice, which is ten kilometers from here. Katowice is the capital of this beautiful Silesian region. I was told then that there was no time table available, and that the last train will depart east at 1:30 p.m., situation permitting. So, I packed my suitcase, locked the door, and left, not knowing then that this would be the last time I would ever see this beautiful place, located only one block from the largest steel mine in Europe. After the war I tried to enter the building to see if there was anything left from the contents of this apartment, but I could not enter because the Russians took over the building for their headquarters.

Normally this trip from Katowice to Krakow takes two and a half hours but there was nothing normal about this trip. The train was under constant bombardment by low flying planes, strafing with automatic fire anything that moved. People were running for shelter, for there were dead bodies all over. Finally, after a day and a half I made it to Krakow. But the engineer had the order to abandon the train. I was just about to leave the train station, this time without my suitcase, which had gotten lost in the shuffle, when I saw a freight train headed in an easterly direction. I took a chance and got on it. As soon as the train left the station I knew that the train was on the proper course. At that time I was only 33 kilometers from home, but it took me a day and a night to get there. I was tired and half starved. The date was September 3, 1939. My ordeal was just about to begin. The Germans were getting closer and closer. A decision was made by my uncles, David, Sam, and their families, and the Neumark family, who provided a wagon and two horses. They were going to leave the city of Bochnia and drive 23

kilometers east to a town named Szczurowa, located on the river Wisla. It was considered safe at that time, and we assumed that the German army would not be able to cross the river, which was deep at this time. My mother decided that at the age of sixteen I was more vulnerable than the younger children and that I should go along with my uncles. Everyone was sure that the Germans would be beaten in a matter of days. There were rumors that the military army would form another defensive line and take every young person available. Just as there were rumors that should the Germans win they would do the same, after occupation. Little did we know then.

As soon as we got under way we found that a lot of other people had the same idea, including the Polish Army. Again, the Germans were bombarding at everything that moved. There were bodies all over. In the meantime feed for the horses was running low and the horses were tired, and we were not sure where we were going. After two weeks the situation looked critical. It seemed as if the whole country was on the run with the Germans in pursuit. By the third week we reached the capital of the Polish-Ukraine, the city of Lwow. It was a large city and not far from the Soviet border. The situation did not improve. There were rumors that the Soviet Army would attack from the east and finish off the Polish Army, and reclaim the part of the Ukraine that they lost to Poland during World War One. Those rumors turned out to be true. The Soviet Union made a pact with Germany, and for Poland the war was over. It had lasted twenty-seven days.

We were now on Soviet territory; the city was full of refugees. Somehow we were able to get a small apartment, if you can call it that. There was one large room and a bathroom, no furniture, and we slept on the floor. We, meaning myself, Uncle Sam, Aunt Mona, about three months later Uncle Adolf and Aunt Berta, after a few weeks cousin Isaac, Uncle Isaac, and your mother. In the same building were the Neumark family and Aunt Ceska and Uncle David. They also had the same place as ours. Also in Lwow was Uncle Max, his wife, and five year old son Daniel. They did not survive the war. Winter was approaching fast in this part of the country, with lots of snow and very cold, and our spirits were low. There was very little food and we had little in the way of clothing. Yet, we adjusted and after awhile we were able to write our families. At that time they were doing better than we did. Finally, winter was over. Meanwhile, the Soviets signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. Soon after that we were told that there is a commission to register anyone who wanted to return home. We had all decided to register. Long lines formed at the registration point and we soon found that we had been tricked. There was no commission there and nobody was going home. All the Russians wanted was to find out how many of us there were, and where we were living. First they took single people like Cousin Isaac. I was too young for them.

Then they came for us. It was at midnight, June 1940, the Russian police and N.K.V.D. went from house to house and loaded us on trucks and took us all to the railroad station. There we were loaded onto cattle cars. The doors were locked from

the outside. There were no windows and we had no idea where we were going, but Siberia was a good bet. We had been traveling for about a day and a half when the train stopped. The doors were opened and we saw that we were in a remote area. There were no people to be seen except for the N.K.V.D. guards guarding the train. We had gotten food and water, but anybody trying to strike up a conversation looked at pointed bayonets.

The trip took us about three weeks. One day the doors opened and we were at the end of our journey. We had arrived in the middle of a forest, with mosquitoes the size of bees. Our faces, legs, and arms were soon swollen from mosquito bites. We spent the first night in the railroad cars. Next morning we disembarked. Our new home had no name, just a number, Tenth Kilometer. That is how far it was to the next settlement. On our arrival the first impression I got was a simple silence and deep thoughts of this dreadful place. We had been relocated to a slave labor camp. The only industry was forestry. We were ordered to build a new city from those tall trees. We were lodged in small dilapidated houses. Each had four rooms with one communal kitchen. Sixteen people were assigned to this house. To my best recollection in this small house there were eight different families. People were sleeping everywhere. There was no electricity, no running water, no heat except for a wood burning stove. We had to chop the wood to keep it burning twenty-four hours a day. There was one communal bath house and each building had an assigned time for bathing. We started to work in the early morning darkness and we finished in darkness. There was very little food to be had and in the beginning we were not allowed to leave this camp at all. To and from the job we were escorted by N.K.V.D. guards. On the job civilian Russians took over and they taught us how to handle those trees and how to prepare them for shipment.

The commander of this camp was a stone-faced N.K.V.D. man by the name of Smirnov, who never smiled and simply looked right through you. He kept asking people the names of their home towns, and then he would say, you will build this town here and it will be your home forever. We were in a restricted area, nobody in and nobody out. We all told him that we had done nothing wrong to deserve such a harsh treatment. But there was no answer to our questions. Eventually we learned from some of our guards that we had been labeled German spies.

We were allowed a few days to settle in. Old people, the sick, and women with small children were excused. Everyone else, if you do not work you do not eat. So we worked hard and lost a lot of weight. After about six months an official came from Moscow with some new orders. Overnight there was a complete turnabout. The guards greeted us with a smile, the food got better, and we were also given passes to town from time to time, but you had to report back to the officer in charge. This raised our morale and gave us new hope. So, day after day the same routine. We did not have any recreation, newspaper, or radio, no movies, no books. Yet our morale was high and no one had given in. Practically everyone survive this camp, except for a few. We were never abused or called bad names. Things loosened up

after that and we were allowed to write postcards home. I received in all two postcards from my mother and my brothers. Thank God, so far they were O.K. For months the Germans were creating ghettos. Rumors persisted that the Soviet Union will go to war against Germany. All kinds of preparations were made, even we were treated better. Eventually it happened a couple of months later, the date was June 22, 1941.

At the camp we were cutting down trees and we were told that they will be used to build bridges, ships, supports for coal mines, and all necessary things to fight the enemy. Winters were very long and very cold, lasting from October till May. The snow never stopped. The temperature dropped to sixty below zero. We had to work in fifty-five below. I remember one night I was loading railroad cars and every one had frozen cheeks, noses, fingers, and every thing exposed.

Actually, the Russian people are very warm and they will share with you as much as they have. They admired us for standing our ground not to be broken. The Soviet citizen was very fearful of the authorities and rightfully so, because the government did not hesitate to put you away for the smallest infraction and there was not one Soviet family that I came across that at one time or another did not have a member in a slave labor camp. The majority of the people in the area of this camp were Marijans. I actually could not find the history of these people. They were very primitive. They did not speak Russian, except for their leaders. Mostly they were old, or they looked old to me. I can't recall any of them my age. For some reason the majority were blind in one eye. Their skin was white as snow. They did not wear shoes, only a self made shoe they called *lapcie*. They were made from young twig skin neatly into twine, and for soles they used animal skin. Actually, they lasted quite long. That was the only part of the U.S.S.R. where I saw this kind of footwear. Those people were very frightened and hard to get acquainted with. Eventually I was able to talk with them after I had learned some of their language. As time went by we were able to trade with them.

Winters here were very severe. The Siberian cold started in October and lasted until May. There was a short time to grow produce but they had good and rich soil and farmers were able to grow potatoes and vegetables. The natives were hunting for bears and wolves. There were a lot of them here. So things were moving not as fast I wished to and we looked forward to the day when we would be able to leave this place and we were looking forward to the day that we would be reunited with our families back home, not knowing then about the tragic circumstances that our families were in.

In the meantime the war was going badly for the Russians. The German army was approaching Moscow. They had already occupied the entire Ukraine, White Russia, Leningrad, and they were approaching the Volga River. Stalingrad was where the Soviet Army made their stand. Millions of people had been lost to this point, both soldiers and civilians.

It had already dawned on us that as bad off as we were being here had most likely saved our lives. So time goes by, not as fast as I would wish it to go, but the road will soon be open for us all. This day eventually came in the early part of 1942, and for the time being we were free people with a lot of worries about where to go, because there is no one to advise you and we really did not know much of this strange new country, except that we knew that the Germans were closing in on Moscow and that there was bitter fighting on the Volga River, in Stalingrad, the Caucasus, and other places. At one point, not realizing the serious situation we were in Saratov on the Volga, and this city was only two hundred miles from Stalingrad. As time goes by so does the winter. This time luck was with the Russians. The severity of the winter had helped them. By February of 1942 the Soviet Army went on the offensive and so did the politicians, both in the United States and Great Britain. Secret negotiations have started, soon truck loads of clothing, food, medicine, trucks, and jeeps from the United States started to arrive. More importantly for us, an agreement was reached to free those in Soviet slave labor camps and permitting them to travel freely in the Soviet Union.

By late summer of 1941 we were free. So, we decided to leave the camp as soon as we received our travel documents. The problem was that we really had no idea where to go. We made a decision to go to the city named Engels, located on the Volga River. Engels was the capital of a German republic, with roots in Germany. It was a very prosperous city, and we had hoped that we might be able to wait out the end of the war there. We traveled by train, then by ship along the Volga River, to a large city named Saratov, and then again by train to our destination. This trip took several days. We had arrived in Engels only to find a ghost town, no people to be seen except for some officials, We floated around the city for hours trying to find out what was going on there and how come there were no people there. Finally we came upon a government office and we were told that the entire republic had been resettled to some place clear across the country. It appeared the Russians suspected them to be German sympathizers and they were taking no chances. We were told that we might spend a day or two in any house we cared to, which is what we did.

On our return from Engels, we were directed to the city of Kulbyshev. But Kulbyshev being a restricted area, we could not reside there due to it being a temporary capital for the Soviet Union. So again we were directed to a small town nearby. The name of this city as far as I remember was Krasnormejskoje. We got assigned a small cottage. I do not have the date, but I recall rainy and cold days. In Russia everyone has to work, so Sam and I were working in a clothing factory; Adolf was employed in transportation. The small houses were built from lime mixed with straw and dry manure, and the roof was covered with straw. At the time we moved into that house we were not aware of the danger involved if not properly ventilated. One night Sam and I came back from a night shift, to find the house full of gas fumes. Everyone inside was asleep and half dazed. After this incident we found out that if not properly ventilated during the rainy season the lime and the

manure create dangerous gases.

So after this experience we decided to leave town for good. This time we went to Central Asia. We traveled along the Volga River to a large city, Kulbyshev and Saratov, and from there we took the train to central Asia. After a long trip which took about ten days we arrived in the country of the Uzbek Republic, in the city of Tashkent. Uzbeks are Soviet citizens. They practice the Moslem religion. Their language, Uzbek, sounded like Arabic. The climate was in one word, hot. The temperature reached one hundred and thirty degrees. To our dismay there were so many people and no facilities for them to live. People were sleeping in the streets, in parks, just anywhere there was an empty spot. Millions of people who were evacuated from Ukraine, White Russia, and other parts, to avoid the German army. They were directed by the Soviet government, which had forgotten or ignored, to provide them with living quarters. People were dying everywhere from hunger, thirst, and sickness.

There was a reason for our being there. The Polish Army was being formed in this area, some three hundred kilometers from the Iranian border. Rumors were that they would be fighting on the western front and that the families of the soldiers would be allowed to follow them across the border to Iran and on to Palestine. We established residence on a farm about three hundred kilometers south east of Tashkent near the city of Namangan, and about 250 miles from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and about 200 miles from China. That will give you an idea of how far we were from Europe and the United States. I have no recollection how we got to this farm, by the name of Kim-Kolkhoz. Kim was the name, Kolkhoz is a collective farm. We were not the only refugees in the Uzbek Republic, about seven million others had the same idea. All the refugees were Soviets running away from the advancing German armies. This was a rich farmland state, with lots of rice, tropical fruits, and all kinds of vegetables, but there were just too many people there. We stayed on the farm hoping to avoid famine and the diseases of the cities, but it was just bad all over. Somehow we survived mostly on vegetables, there was no bread or meat or anything else. We got introduced to the manager of this village. An Uzbek, he did not speak or understand Russian. He became friendly with us because we were not Russians. Uzbeks hate the Soviets because Uzbeks are very religious people and they believe in Allah as their god.

There were no apartments but the manager allowed us to live in his office. We had to improvise for furniture so we made our beds from old doors, with straw mattresses. I worked for awhile picking cotton, then I had to feed horses and camels. Work started at 4 a.m. until 12 p.m. and at 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and longer. The reason for the early start was the heat, which was enormous. In between, Sam and I were doing some tailoring for the bosses of this village for food only, yet we did not see a slice of bread for months. One day the government was looking for workers to build a water dam and a reservoir some fifty kilometers away. Adolf and I went there by foot, there was no transportation. The pay was supposed to be bread and some

money plus food on the job. It took us two days to get there and when we finally got there they had hired so many people that they had to turn us away. For our trouble each of us got eight pitas, they called them *lepioshka*, each weighing about a quarter of a pound. Back we went. The Uzbeks were excellent horsemen and when a man was drafted to the army he was provided with a horse from the farm and they both went to war. We had to get out of this place as soon as possible. Geographically we were living near the city of Namangan, about two hundred fifty miles from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan and about two hundred miles from China. That will give you an idea of how far we were from Europe and the United States.

Finally after about two or three months we were able to register with General Sikorski's Polish Army, all Polish citizens from former slave labor camps and former soldiers from prisoner of war camps from 1939. All together there were about two million, including about one hundred fifty thousand Polish Jews. Registration was near the city of Samarkand, some three hundred kilometers from where we were staying. Sam, Adolf, and I registered and we waited several examinations. They even cut our hair, only to be informed that they had reached their limit. We were promised to be informed when the second unit would be assembled. Disappointed, we had no recourse but to return home. This unit left for Iran and Palestine, then England, and eventually fought and took Monte Casino. There they sustained enormous losses, but for the first time Polish soldiers achieved victory. By the way, former Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin was able to go with the Polish Army as a Polish soldier, and eventually stay in Israel. He was in a labor camp not far from where I had been.

Conditions on the farm did not improve, so we tried to return to the area we had left. Uncle David and his family had stayed behind and we asked him to supply us with special papers we needed to make that trip back. You see, you cannot go anywhere in the Soviet Union unless you have a travel permit. You simply cannot go to a railroad station and buy a ticket. You need a request from your future employer and a letter from the manager stating that you were very important to them. You also need clearance from the K.G.B., or as they were known then, the N.K.V.D. After all this you waited and hoped that all of this would work for you. Eventually we succeeded and after six months we were able to return. The return trip was a nightmare in itself. Traveling in the Soviet Union was less than luxurious in the best of times. These were not the best of times. Horse and wagon, railroad trip where there were no seats to be had. You had to provide your own food, there were no sleeping facilities. When the train stopped at a station the conductor would announce how long they will stay for refueling or a change of crew. So we had time to exchange some things for food. The only things we had were matches and salt. There was one stretch that took us two and a half days to pass through a desert where there was absolutely nothing. The name of that desert is Kuzi-Kum in the Kazakh Republic. Now the Soviets' largest missile base is there. They send the cosmonauts into space from there. Finally after some two weeks we reached our destination. There was no food shortage there, and bread never tasted

better. We had jobs waiting for us and a place to live, and we settled in as good as we could.

The war was fought bitterly, but this time in favor of the Russians. By the end of 1942 a Polish consulate opened up in Kuibyshev and we were issued Polish passports. In November 1942 I was notified that a Polish volunteer army was being formed to take part in the effort to free Eastern Europe from the German occupation. We knew the situation in Poland was bad. We had heard about the formation of ghettos and labor camps but we still had no idea how bad it really was. I was young, single, and not glad to leave everyone behind, especially your mother-to-be, but I had to volunteer because I felt that this was the only way we had of ever getting back home. I was always hoping that my family would be alive.

I sent in my application and in the beginning of February of 1943 I was in the army. To set the record straight this did not turn out to be a true volunteer army because in the end they took every able-bodied man and woman. The name of my unit was the First Polish Division, named Tadeusz Kosciuszko, with the first infantry regiment. We were assembling about one hundred thirty kilometers from Moscow, near a village called Divovo. The nearest large cities were Ryazan and Kaluga. Nearby was a large river, Oka. The front line was one hundred sixty kilometers away. I was assigned to the first infantry regiment, first battalion, with the first mortar company. Our weapon was an eighty-two millimeter rocket launcher. It worked this way. We had telephone lines to the front line position. The officer in charge sent the particulars about the enemy's position and distance, I set the target and gave the order to fire. This was a very interesting three part launcher. If set correctly it was quite devastating, yet it had a reach of only five hundred meters. It arched like a rainbow. The bad part was that the enemy was always out to destroy us, since we did a great deal of damage to their front lines.

After about two months of training I was given one stripe, which meant Private First Class, and was chosen to join Sergeant Military Academy. This was a very select group of soldiers, very strict and disciplined, and demanding. You were expected to have leadership qualities, and I am not sure I had that, but I was chosen and I did not object. Then again, as you know, you do not object in the army. There were about two hundred forty of us from the whole division of eighteen thousand men. All the officers were commissioned and professional soldiers. Because the front line was only one hundred sixty kilometers away most of the training was conducted at night. After about three months of training the order came to move on to the front lines, and the whole First Division went to the front. It took us about six days to get there and we immediately dug in. We started out on the railroad about one hundred kilometers, then about sixty on foot, jeep, and horseback. We moved strictly at night because the German air force was bombing and strafing all the time. You do not realize how dangerous the mission is until you get there. It was frightening. We dug in immediately and deep, while the scout units were observing the territory and the commanding officer was marking plans. After about

a day or two we were ordered to cover the infantry, while they tried heroically to advance. We succeeded in pushing back the enemy five kilometers, with very heavy losses. The firing lasted a day and a half, and then we were ordered to withdraw. I came out in one piece, but I lost a couple of close army buddies. The area we were in was heavy marshland, and not adaptable for heavy armor and tanks so we had no tank support yet we succeeded in breaking through the enemy lines and moving forward. This part of the front was eventually broken through eight months later. Our losses were very high, two thirds in all units throughout the division. But I was lucky. All this fighting took place near the town of Lenino, near the city of Smolensk.

We withdrew twenty kilometers into a thick forest to regroup and wait for reinforcements. I do not recall the nearest town from the forest where we were stationed, but in any case we were about fifteen kilometers from the Katyn Forest. This was the area where the Germans blamed the Soviets for murdering over three thousand soldiers and officers taken prisoner during the Soviet invasion of Poland in September, 1939. After this area was reoccupied by the Soviets in 1943 an international commission was sent there to investigate those murders. While those proceedings were going on a delegation from our unit was sent there, and I was with them. The delegation included eight people in all, one of whom was our lieutenant. The Soviets had opened the graves for the investigation. Our lieutenant was a cadet in a military academy in 1939, then detained by the Soviets after his capture in 1939. He was devastated to find among the dead soldiers his commander from the academy, from a list posted there. Of course, at that time we were sure that the Germans were capable of doing that, after all they did murder millions of people in the Soviet Union. We did not think that the Russians would have time to kill all of those officers while they were being chased by the Germany Army. Besides, they had over two million Poles, including some one hundred fifty thousand Jews, in their slave labor camps, including many ex-army men, and they did not kill them. A lot had died from malnutrition, illness, hunger, and other things, but we were not shot at.

However, in November of 1944 in the city of Praga-Warszawska, which is located on the right bank of the Wisla River just across from Warsaw, I met a Polish family while I was looking for a sewing machine to use to make new uniforms for myself and my commander. I was able to do that whenever there was a pause in the action. This lady was a widow, very kind and decent. I was invited into her home and I was free to do as much as I wanted. After a few hours she told me about the suffering she and her family were subjected to, and that she had lost her husband during the occupation. I asked her about the Jewish population in the Warsaw Ghetto and in the area. She indicated to me that while her husband was alive they were able to help in some way the Jewish family they had known. She mentioned their name but I have forgotten it. But after her husband's death the situation worsened and the Jewish family of three left in order not to jeopardize her. She also disclosed to me that one of her sons was in the Polish Army during the

1939 was , with the rank of lieutenant. At first she did not know whether he was alive or dead. Then she received a letter from the German government informing her that he was shot by the Russians. In 1943 she again received a letter, but this time from her son stating that he was alive in Germany. I always tried to go back to my situation. She knew that I was Jewish because I told her so, and that I had left my family in the city of Bochnia. I also told her that I had written a letter home and to the mayor of the city. She started to cry and shake her head. I did not want to harm her with my questions. She told me in her own words, I still remember, go on my child. At this point I was the big soldier with the two guns on me and in charge of an artillery gun, but I started to cry. I regained my composure. They were a nice family, very warm and decent. Anyway, I was able to finish the uniforms for my captain and myself. Christmas came and my captain and I were invited to her home with ten other soldiers of my choice for the Christmas Eve dinner. That was my first sit down dinner since the summer of 1939. After my return from the war in 1945 I got in touch with that family to let them know that I was all right. I was told by her daughter that the widow had passed away but that she was able to see her son, who did come back from the camp.

We got additional men in December 1943. Winter was in full swing by then. A lot of heavy snow had fallen, accompanied by very strong winds that created deep drifts. For many days and nights the army lined up, one to another, with wooden shovels, and shoveled that snow without moving out of your designated spot. And, as fast as you pushed the snow, that fast you got new one come down, with low temperature, but we were already used to that and nobody paid any attention. A little later we were struck with dysentery. Almost everybody got it, including me. Many died from this illness but I was lucky and fully recovered after three weeks in the field hospital. At first we suspected the Germans of poisoning the water, but we soon found out that they had the same problem. This territory, with the largest marshlands in Europe, had problems with its drinking water. After recovery from the illness I was discharged from the hospital. It was then that I decided to change my unit, even though I had only three weeks until I graduated from the academy. There were openings in the artillery due to losses sustained at our maiden encounter at Lenino and I took a chance and asked for a transfer. It was not easy, but I was able to persuade a young secretary to try for my transfer. She then told me my case will be difficult due to being in a special unit, but I was able to stand a chance due to my ability and leadership shown in my last assignment.

In a few days I was notified that my transfer had been approved. It made a big difference to me, a change from a small mortar to a big three ton howitzer cannon with a range of eight kilometers. But, we were never farther from the front positions than two kilometers. The name of this unit was the First Field Artillery Regiment, with the First Division, Battery Number One. It consisted of four 122 millimeter cannon with sixty-four men manning them, plus eight rivers, one special scout unit of eight men, sixteen telephone and radio linemen, our own quartermaster, and our own field kitchen. I was assigned to be the gunner, which

was a very responsible position, because of my previous training. Most of the men were veterans from the 1939 war. I was very happy with this unit. Being in a small unit you have the advantage of knowing everyone. Each of us would watch out for the others, just like a close family. We had a very good commanding officer, and this time I did not have to walk and carry a launcher weighing twenty kilograms. We were driving American big Studebakers. It was now January 1944 and we were on the move again. Although we were under Polish command our General Staff was taking orders from the First White Russian Commander General Rokosowsky. General Rokosowsky decided to shift our division to a different flank and we succeeded in pushing the enemy back.

At the beginning of 1944 we were somewhere in White Russia. As I recall, winter that year was very brutal, with an enormous snowfall, bitter cold, and wind. We had to keep our roads open and maintain them twenty-four hours with shifts from each outfit, and clear the snow manually with deep wooden shovels. At the same time we had to keep our enemy on guard with a steady artillery bombardment. As I remember, at the end of March 1944 our offensive had begun with slow moving progress, with heavy losses to both manpower and equipment. Along the way we discovered the enormous atrocities committed against the civilian population in that area of White Russia. I did not know if they were singled out by association or race, none of the mass graves had crosses or Stars of David. As a front line soldier your objective is to get to your assigned destination, with one thing in mind, trust ahead and stay alive, concentrate and remember what you have seen.

By April of 1944, after three months of agony and sadness, we reached the pre-1939 Polish border, the old Polish border. In 1939, twenty-seven days after Poland lost its war with Germany, Germany and Russia once more divided Poland. The Soviet Union took the western part of the Ukraine and the western part of White Russia. Those territories change hands each time war erupts; by the time the second world war had ended the Soviet Union had no intention of giving this territory to Poland. Instead, she divided Germany, and gave Upper Silesia, lower, East, and West Prussia all the way to the Baltic Sea from Gdansk-Kolberg-Szczecin to Poland, naming it the Oder-Neisse line. In actuality this area is much larger and richer in raw materials and farmland.

Our losses were tremendous, but our unit was intact. This time our main thrust was to reach the capital of Poland, the city of Warsaw. In May we crossed the river Bug. This was indeed a great obstacle, but it would enable us to push in a direct line into the historic city off Lublin. The Germans had hoped to hold their positions on the opposite side of the river, so we had no choice but to pursue the enemy. After liberating a huge amount of territory from the enemy our objective was to occupy Lublin, the capital city of this region, and a city known to Jews throughout the world as a cradle of Jewish learning. We occupied this city on July 23, 1944. I had not seen such destruction of human lives and horses, passing through a front line like this. From that day on we continued liberating towns, cities, and villages,

and the people in them, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. We knew then of two existing large concentration camps nearby. The first one was Sobibor. We did not find any survivors there. The second concentration camp was Majdanek, the second largest to Auschwitz. We had hoped to be able to free those poor souls there. Although we knew things were bad there no one could have imagined the horror that was taking place there. We had come across mass graves in the Soviet Union, but we had not seen any concentration camps. We had occupied the camps by the middle of July. There was not a living soul left alive. It would serve no purpose to describe what I saw there. All of it is now a public record. But one thing still stands in front of me. Hundreds of thousands of shoes sorted out according to sizes, men's, ladies', and children's. I can still see them in front of my eyes.

We were moving slowly, fighting was very heavy and the Germans were deploying big rockets. They used the V-1 and V-2 rockets there. They were using them over London. Some of them landed near our positions but failed to explode. At first we did not know what to make out of these monsters, but we soon got to know them. Progress came very slowly, this was a very populated area with small cities and towns. Losses on both sides were tremendous, and the warm weather did not help either. We had reached the outskirts of Warsaw in August of 1944. It was a large city named Praga-Warszawska, located on the right bank of the largest river in Poland, the river Wisla. When you cross the river you are in the capital city, Warsaw. This river created a buffer zone, and now everyone was healing their wounds. We were ordered to pull back for a well-deserved rest, the first one since October of 1943. The front was quiet. My protective cannon shield was heavily damaged, but the vital instruments and my head were alright. Our commander was severely wounded, we had lost two communication men, but the rest of our battery was O.K. By August 19 we joined the rest of the regiment. There were so many dead soldiers that each unit had to help to dispose of the bodies, a very painful task indeed, but necessary to avoid all kinds of epidemics in the August heat. The enemy was trying to attack at various points across the river. At one point they even launched a counter offensive but it failed.

We were on a flat area, dug in deep. On orders from the Soviet headquarters a special unit was using observation balloons and the Germans were shooting them down. So the regiment commander decided to send a group of volunteers under the command of our captain to observe the frontal positions and find a weak spot which would allow us to cross the river, collect all possible information, get an enemy soldier, and bring him along with us. Sounds like a fairy tale, but it had been accomplished many times before, maybe not across a large river. All together we were eight or nine men selected by our captain. We had been promised all kinds of medals, but none of us were given a guarantee of returning alive. I was one of the chosen ones. I had no idea what the captain saw in me; I assumed it was because I had knowledge of the German language. I had no choice but to agree; secondly, I would never have refused the order of my captain because I had the highest respect for him. After all, he was going along with us. We had observed for five days and

on the sixth day we were supposed to cross. While at the river bank at our observation point our captain received a message to return to our positions immediately. As it turned out the infantry regiment which our battery was supporting was under heavy attack on our right flank near the town of Calvary. Calvary is a small, hilly town opposite the city of Warsaw. Warsaw is to the left and Modlin is to the right. Calvary is known to the Catholic community throughout Europe as a holy shrine. Each year in May or June there is a pilgrimage to this town. In a way we were lucky that the Germans decided to attack this Modlin front because the mission that was canceled was very dangerous. When you are chosen for a mission of this magnitude you cannot allow yourself to think in a negative way or to think about the danger involved. But deep down we knew how risky this mission was and how slim our chances were of returning. Thank God it was canceled, and I did not have to cross the river at that time, and I can reminisce about it now. As it turned out the infantry regiment sustained heavy losses but we were able to beat the German attack back. After four days this front stabilized itself and we returned to our old defensive lines. Our battery came out on top without sustaining casualties. Those attacks continued until January 17, 1945.

I had not explained to you how the support system worked between the artillery and the infantry. There are four infantry regiments in a division and there is one artillery regiment, split into four batteries, each one supporting one infantry regiment. So the coordination is of the utmost importance. We immediately returned to our positions under heavy cover. Our captain lost his hat and we could not retrieve it.

In late September or early October 1944 the rumor spread that our Army Commander General Berling had received an urgent appeal from the Polish partisans in Warsaw, requesting regimental assistance on the other side of the river Wisla. Supposedly he was assured of safe passage across the river by the partisans, so he sent over the Third Regiment from the Third Division. It was a disaster. Many soldiers died and casualties were high. I personally lost two friends and one fellow my age lost his leg. We had been together in the labor camp. After this incident the general was relieved of his command and we never heard from him again. Later we were told by the politicians that General Berling did not first consult his superior commander, General Rokosowski, who was in charge of the First White Russian front. We were all very sad and felt sorry for him. He was our first commander. I met him many times, he was right with you on the line, and all of us looked up to him like a father. I know that he did not do this as a reckless thing, because he admired his troops. At the same time the regimental commander General Galicki was also relieved of his command. The reason given for his dismissal was that he did so against better judgment.

While the liberation of Poland continued we received only a lukewarm reception from the local population. After being stationed on the west bank of the Wisla through Christmas and past New Year's until the sixteenth of January, 1945 I

had the privilege of meeting some local people and trying to find out why our men were receiving this cold treatment. I also came across one Jewish family of three who survived the Warsaw Ghetto and were living in the area. They blamed the outcome of the Ghetto Uprising mostly on the people outside the walls and to a great degree on the most active and well organized fighting resistance group in Poland, the Home Army or Armja Krajowa (AK).

Unfortunately, Jews were not admitted to their ranks except in a few instances of not being recognized as Jews, and the population were fed false accusations the the First Polish Army was full of communists in Polish uniforms, which naturally, to my knowledge, was the biggest lie of all. If the same group of leaders would have given a helping hand to the Jewish resistance in the ghetto and elsewhere, Hitler would never have succeeded with the Final Solution. The sad story is that many of the Jewish resistance fighters accosted in the forest by the members of the AK lost their lives on the spot. It is very hard to understand this, especially when both groups were hunted by the Germans. Those stories were told to me by the surviving family and by an honest Christian in the latter part of 1944.

It is very painful to write about that because as a child and later as a teen I had no problems growing up in Poland, nor did I have any problem in the military. I cannot accuse every Pole of doing wrong at that time because there were many of them who assisted Jewish families and ghetto fighters. If the conditions and help from the AK had been different the outcome of the general uprising of August 2, 1944 would have been different, in my opinion. The uprising would have succeeded and the relations between those great religions would have had a new beginning and understanding. The AK accused the Polish Army fighting on the eastern front of being communist, at the same time that the Polish soldiers who served on the western front were the good guys and the "real" Poles, not saying or mentioning that both groups were interned in Siberian labor camps not by their own choice. In many cases due to the sudden exit, families were split and never reunited again, and this is the sad part.

When the Polish Army started to organize in the U.S.S.R. in 1941-42, all of us were released after the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain entered into an agreement after the war broke out on June 22, 1941. There were about two million Poles in the labor camps, including a small percentage of P.O.W.s and Jews. In the late summer of 1941 it was decided by the Polish exiles in London to form a Polish military force in the U.S.S.R. and fight the Nazis on both fronts, starting with the eastern front. The war situation looked very grim for the Russians in 1941. This agreement was signed by General Wladislaw Sikorski and Josef Stalin, with the agreement of Churchill and Roosevelt.

In Russia General Wladislaw Anders was put in charge of the division forming near the city of Saratov on the Volga River, some two hundred miles from Stalingrad. General Anders was one of the high officers who survived the Katyn

massacre of thousands of Polish P.O.W. officers by the Russians near Smolensk in 1940. Polish people descended from all over to enlist and join the army, but first we had to get some food to get on our feet. None of us was ready for military training and this process was very slow. The timetable was set but General Anders could not deliver his troops on time and he arrived at the conclusion that one division would not do the job right. There were just too many Poles in the camp to be processed. By the time I reached this area the army had moved to Central Asia, near Tashkent. By the spring of 1942 over seventy thousand soldiers and family members had left the Soviet Union for Iran. By the summer over forty thousand more had left. None were assigned to the eastern front. There were many families split by that development who were never reunited again. It was estimated that about one hundred ten or one hundred forty thousand people departed and that about 1,860,000 were left behind at the mercy of the Soviets. Among those who did not want to leave was Colonel Zigmunt Berling. He was on General Anders' staff, a professional officer who spent time with Anders at the P.O.W. camp and was released in 1940, in time to be saved from the Katyn Forest tragedy.

Our unit was already on the move back to the fighting again. After a few days we were able to join the rest of the regiment without sustaining any casualties. This situation persisted until the 17th of January, 1945. I remember this day very well. We had launched an overnight offensive on all fronts facing the river and by mid-morning we were across the river Wisla and in the capital city of Warsaw. The city was in ruins. We had passed the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto, a sad scene indeed. Seeing what I have seen to this point my hopes for my family were depleting. But we had to move on forward as fast as we could to save as many people as possible. From here on the situation got a little better. There were no rivers to cross, at least until we reached the German border. We were advancing in a northwest direction through Poland into German Pomeria to the Baltic Sea. In Poland we passed through the cities of Plock, Wlocawek Torun, Bydgoszcz, Chelmno. Chelmno is a small city about twenty-five kilometers from Bydgoszcz. We had no knowledge then of what had gone on there. There were no large buildings, no railroad tracks leading to anything. Then we were told by the population that there was a death camp there and that over 350,000 Jews had been put to death by gas. Of course, we could not stay there. Our aim was to block the German escape through the Baltic Sea and to trap this S.S. army in the forests of Pomeria. At first fighting was light, and in some instances very light.

As we crossed into Germany this changed and they fought with everything they had. All cities and towns were empty, they were evacuated. The stores were full of things but no people. On this part of the front there were small and medium-sized cities and a lot of farmland and villages, and forests stretching in some parts all the way to the sea. Cities of particular importance were Zlotow, Jastrow, Rederitz, Markish-Friedland, Stargard, Tempelburg, Falkenburg, Bramburg, Kolberg, Paulus-Dorff, and many more. We had orders to capture the enemy city of Zlotow, and that is what we did. Fighting was very heavy and casualties were high on both sides.

One day I witnessed a tank battle near the city of Markish-Friedland where we lost thirty tanks and the Germans lost twenty-five of theirs. The enemy was deploying a fairly new weapon, the Panzerfaus, weighing about five pounds but very effective. To confirm our losses I have a very interesting story to tell. I am not sure I have ever told this to anyone, not even your mother. She did not want to dwell on the past and I did not want to volunteer anymore. Fighting in the forest was very difficult. Visibility was very poor, and it was very difficult to maneuver the big cannons. At one point the Germans actually surrounded us and for almost a week we were cutoff with no supplies coming in. Another unit came to our rescue and after heavy fighting the enemy surrendered. That heavy fighting was going on until March, 1945. Finally our ordeal came to an end and we marched on. The German army we were fighting was none other than the Himmler Division, an elite group that did not give up without a fight, however difficult it might be. But we broke through and by the tenth of April we were in the port city of Stettin on the Baltic Sea. The northwestern front was completely defeated.

Before I go any further here is the story I promised you. The name of the village is Paulus-Dorff. We had occupied a farm just outside Stettin. We had been commanded to dig in at this farm, large and impressive, but abandoned. Some soldiers were ordered to inspect the area and report back of safe conditions. A day or two later another soldier and I went to a barn to look for some eggs when I notice a moving motion in a pile of straw in one of the corners. I shouted in Polish, "Who's there?" The response was also in Polish. The voice sounded unfamiliar. I then ordered him to come out with his hands up, in German, while the other soldier called for reinforcements. Out came ten S.S. soldiers and one captain. Well, they had enough ammunition to wipe us out. As it turned out the same captain commanded the tank battle and he very accurately described our losses that day, and how lucky we had been that day because they would have tried to break out that night. So I received a pat on the back and a fat medal, and the original guys who searched this place red faces.

April 1945. One of many recollections I have is of the city of Oranienburg, about fifty kilometers from Berlin. It is located between Tempelhof airport, Potsdam, and the Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate. In that city there was a large concentration camp, fully equipped, plus tremendous factories for making clothes for the army and to manufacture airplane parts. As far as I can remember there was little destruction to this city. The name of the camp was Sachsenhausen, a notorious one indeed. As far as I can remember we found about two thousand inmates there. The majority were women of eastern European origin, from Hungary, and in very poor condition. We also came upon some S.S. guards and they went quickly down the drain. When we interviewed Germans living nearby they insisted they knew nothing about what was going on there. We also came upon a bunker about twenty kilometers from Oranienburg. We were told by the Germans that Hitler and his staff were there about three hours before. I also saw there hundreds of large, pure white rabbits, the size of a small dog, with large blue-

green eyes. We helped the inmates with whatever we could and then the administrative unit took over and we had to continue on to our destination, which was Berlin.

The closer we got, the stronger the resistance, but we had the upper hand. The destruction was not spared and the city lay in ruins. Losses on both sides were very high. We knew that this would be the end of the war, but there was no time to think about that.

Now that this part of the front was completed we turned our attention to the big push towards the city of Berlin, where the whole tragic war started. Our biggest obstacle to overcome was to cross the largest river in Germany, the river Oder, in order to complete a circle around Berlin. On the 15th of April 1945 more power than the German army had faced before amassed on the opposite side of the river. The existing bridges were unsafe or destroyed and our engineers had to lay phantom bridges under cover of smoke screen. The enemy had strong fortifications and beautiful bunkers, but the firing never let up and in the end it was just too much for them and they left the bunkers and ran with the entire front in pursuit of them. We got held back for awhile at the Zello Heights but that was overcome and by the 18th of April we were in Berlin. Thank God we sustained no casualties to our unit in this drive. To be in Berlin was a miracle itself, especially for me. By then I knew already that my family perished in the Holocaust. Fighting was intense and very difficult. Berlin was full of civilians and we had strict orders not to harm them, as a matter of fact this order was given to every soldier before we crossed the German border. To disobey would invite severe punishment.

The resistance grew the closer we were getting to the city. The destruction was not spared and the whole city lay in ruins. Losses on both sides were tremendous. We knew this would be the end of the war, yet there was no time to think about it. You just try to outmaneuver your enemy and win every scrap of land from him and hope for the best. My responsibility at this point was to get a good location for our cannon and protection for the crew. In close range fighting there is no time for command orders, you just try to get a good view of the enemy and be as fast as you can to fire your gun and outmaneuver him, and hope for the best. Fighting was now simply street to street and door to door. The most difficult in street fighting is a tank or cannon, because you cannot maneuver it and it is very difficult to hide them. Now we were getting close to the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate, the Reich Chancellery, the official headquarters for the Nazi government. So it was extremely hard to look at your fallen comrades in arms when you had your victory in front of your eyes. In a war there are many things you cannot forget. One of them was Alexander-Platz, a beautiful park with lovely gardens, and there was that vicious fighting going on all around it. I was lucky enough to get a spot in the park, where we had some protection from bushes. My cannon was occupying a spot that had brought bad luck to its previous occupants. Four cannon from different units had been destroyed there and one tank, so I

cannot say that I was smart, I think it was God's will that we survived. We held this position for about two days and it was all over. So we did our best for almost two weeks of close range fighting in Berlin.

My crew and I came out of it on top and finally it was over at 2 a.m. May 2, 1945. Berlin had succumbed. The devastation was tremendous in human lives and property, but thank God we stayed alive and well. And now finally, after almost two and a half years of sleepless nights we got a good night of sleep two days after it was all over. The only casualty was my uniform. It caught two shrapnel fragments which did not penetrate because I had special padding on the upper part just for that. One of my soldiers was hit in the arm but did not need hospitalization. The cannon next to ours was not as lucky. They received a direct hit and the whole crew lost their lives. Just think of it, the last two hours of the war. Finally, it was over. It is hard to describe our feelings. Silent prayers were said. Nobody was ashamed to show tears in their eyes. It was really over and Hitler and Germany were defeated. The outcome was devastating in human lives. Property you do not count, for that is replaceable, but millions of human beings were gone forever. I was happy, very happy, but at the same time very sad because I had lost my whole family, my relatives, my schoolmates, my home. Thank God, I still had your mother to be and my relatives who survived the Soviet labor camps, but I had no knowledge of when I would be able to see them all. But the most important thing was that the war was over. Our final position for the last day of the war was at the Alexander-Platz, near the central post office. The shooting stopped at 2 a.m. on May 2, 1945.

And now it is time to go home, but there is nobody there. This memory is still with me to this day. I have spent many sleepless nights after the war over that. But life had to go on. By the end of May 1945 the whole First Division was returning to Poland to a city named Siedlce, located about seventy kilometers from Warsaw. The reason for that was that the capital, Warsaw, was destroyed. We were told that eventually our division would be stationed in Warsaw. The record shows two hundred fifty six survivors out of the whole original division coming out from this dreadful war without a scratch. By a special decree the record of the First Division was entered into the annals of the Polish history books. Now the division was permanently stationed in the capital city, Warsaw.

As soon as we crossed the Polish borders in April 1944 I sent a letter to the mayor of my home town asking for any information on the whereabouts of members of my family, listing everybody by name. The answer I got in March 1945 was a long letter informing me that he regrets very much, but to the best of his knowledge there were no survivors. Still believing in miracles I had asked my commanding officer while still in Germany for a leave of absence when the war was over. He kept his promise and in the beginning of June I returned home. I came across a couple of my schoolmates and they were shocked to see me alive and in uniform. I was invited to their homes to reminisce about the good old years. But as far as my family, they could only repeat what I already knew. Our home was

demolished. Our neighbors, when they saw me, thought that I was a living ghost. They embraced me full of tears. I called the mayor of the city to thank him and let him know I had survived this war. He invited me to stay with his family. I accepted his invitation and spent two days at his home. Then it was time to go back. We embraced and I left, crying in silence. I never returned to my home town. My family was taken to Auschwitz, only about seventy kilometers away. One should remember that before the war Oswiecim, or Auschwitz as the Germans named it, was mainly known for the fact that it was the biggest beer producer in Poland.

So, life goes on. We can never forget them. I did all I could to help defeat the German army and save as many people as I could, but of course it was not enough. This was my only reason for volunteering for such hazardous duty, and not for any glory. I had been given at one point the chance to be stationed behind the lines and I objected vigorously. A deputy regiment commander threatened me with court martial if I did not assume the duties assigned to me. My answer was that I did not volunteer to be behind the lines. He had no answer to that and let it go. Maybe it sounds corny or stupid but I sincerely felt that I had been given a chance, which was more than my brothers had gotten or than millions of others had gotten. Given the same circumstances I would surely do it again. It was my nature and it still is today not to harm even a fly, but I had to do what I did to protect the honor of my people and the country I was fighting for. I know that my parents would have been proud of me knowing that I had given all to save them from the ordeal they were in. And despite the evil that the Germans did I will forgive them. Retribution will be theirs, if not in this world then surely in the next one. I am proud of what I did during this terrible war and I do not wish anyone to go through the same things that I went through, but I thank God for taking good care of me and the rest of my crew. I have received fourteen distinguished medals and special commendations.

All that was left was to get my discharge from the army in September of 1945. I got married to your lovely mother on November 18, 1945, left Poland in the spring of 1946 for Munich, Germany, to emigrate to the United States, which we did in April 1947, and the rest is history...

Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust

On December 7, 1941 the first mass killing of Jews by gas took place at the small village of Chelmno. Jews were brought from the surrounding areas, held over night in a church, then loaded on special buses. While in transit for a short distance gas was released and by the time they reached the nearby forest all were dead. They were then burned in open ditches. And so began the beginning of the Jewish destruction in Europe. Over two hundred fifty thousand Jews died at this site. On March 13, 1942 the second such camp was ready at the small town of Belz in western Galicia. This small shtetl was known before the war for its very famous grand rabbi of Belz and for the old song *My Shtetl Belz*. This city was occupied by Hasidic Jews the last time I was there, about September 7, 1939, while I was running away from the German army. The first six thousand Jews killed there came from the city of Mielec, which I also passed in 1939. In the end more than three hundred sixty thousand Jews lost their lives there, plus fifteen hundred Poles were deported and gassed there because they had helped some of their Jewish neighbors. Shortly afterwards other camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Maidanek were put into operation and the Jewish people of Europe were demolished.

The Nazis had singled out the Jews of Lithuania. Hitler planned to kill all the Jews in Europe and the Jews of Lithuania were chosen first in line. So, on January 1, 1942 in the ghetto of Vilno one hundred fifty young Jews gathered not to mourn the sixty thousand already murdered but on behalf of the twenty thousand still alive behind barbed wire and they declared that they would not be led like lambs to the slaughter. And so the resistance was born in the Vilno ghetto and elsewhere. Eventually this event led to a break out from the ghetto to join the partisans in the nearby forest.

In the Warsaw Ghetto on July 28, 1942 a Jewish fighting organization was secretly set up by the men and women of the ghetto, determined to resist, if possible, the daily deportations to the Treblinka death camp. On January 18, 1943 a German unit entered the ghetto to start the deportations again. Six hundred Jews were killed in the streets and six hundred were deported to Treblinka. A group of Jews managed to acquire arms and fired back and several German soldiers fell. On the 21st of January a grenade was thrown at the building in which the Jews sought to resist. and so the resistance continued. The Germans left with a total of twelve soldiers killed. With courage twelve hundred Jewish soldiers battled in the streets, apartments, cellars, and sewers of the Warsaw Ghetto. The Jews possessed only seventeen rifles. The Germans brought in twenty one hundred troops with machine guns, howitzers, and rifles. According to reports three hundred soldiers were killed, many by hand-made grenades, before the revolt was crushed three weeks later.

April 7 was not lucky for the Jews of the historic city of Zamosc. The first twenty-five hundred Jews were sent by train to the third Nazi death camp, outside

the village of Sobibor. On the last day of April 1943 the Germans deported two thousand Polish Jews from the nearby city of Wlodowa to Sobibor. Both these towns were liberated by our army in July of 1944. On reaching the camp the Jews from Wlodowa attacked the S.S. guards with pieces of wood torn from the carriages. The whole transport of Jews was shot or blown away with grenades. Like the revolt of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and hundreds of other ghettos throughout eastern Europe, this one was a desperate and hopeless act of resistance. The machinery of tyranny and mass murder was too overwhelming to overcome. The death camp of Treblinka, located between Warsaw and Lublin in central Poland saw a revolt by those who were forced to dig up corpses to burn them to hide the evidence of the genocide committed by the German S.S. and their collaborators. Of the seven hundred Jewish slave laborers in the camp more than five hundred were shot during the revolt by the S.S. and Ukrainian guards, but over one hundred fifty managed to escape. Some were subsequently hunted down by the guards.

Those who lived under terror had no alternative but to submit to it if they were to avoid reprisals and the murder of hostages. Yet for the slave labor gang now being used to dig up dead bodies and burn them death was also to be their end. So they decided to revolt at the former Sobibor death camp on October 13, 1943. They attacked their armed guards with knives and hatchets, led by a Soviet prisoner of war, Alexander Perchesky, and a Polish Jew, Leon Feldhendler. They turned on their guards, killing nine S.S. men and two Ukrainian guards. By breaking the camp's wire fence three hundred people escaped. Two hundred were killed, one hundred dispersed into the forests and swamps of eastern Poland and were able to join the Russian partisan units in the forest. Our army entered Sobibor about the 22nd of July, 1944. No survivors were left.

In a slave labor camp at Koldychewo in German-occupied White Russia the revolt on March 20, 1944 was led by a Jew named Shlomo Kushner. During the revolt Nazi guards were killed and hundreds of laborers reached the forest and joined the partisans. Kushner and twenty others were caught. He committed suicide before he could be tortured. The following day in the nearby Bialystok area a Soviet partisan group led by a Jew, Sergeant Andrei Tsymbal, with a large number of Jewish fighters under his command, destroyed a German military train carrying armored cars to the eastern front.

On November 2, 1943 yet another death camp was in operation near the city of Lublin, known as the cradle of Jewish learning and scholars. This was the concentration camp of Maidanek. Within a week forty-five thousand survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto were killed there. After that week five thousand former Jewish soldiers of the Polish army were murdered there, disregarding the Geneva convention. These soldiers had been prisoners of war in the Lublin area since October 1939, that is for the past four years. In July 1944 my unit entered this camp, but there were no survivors. The Germans evacuated this camp hours before our arrival, except for the hundred of unburied corpses, six or seven gas chambers, and

thousands of shoes.

The details of the killing in German-occupied Poland western Russia reached horrifying proportions. All the western governments were aware of the tragedy going on in those countries. On January 13, 1942 representatives from all nine occupied countries met in London to sign a declaration that all of those found guilty of war crimes would be punished after the war. Among the signers were General De Gaulle of France and General Sikorski of Poland. The slaughter of innocent people continued. Not a single day passed without the perpetration of crimes against defenseless civilians. I came upon mass graves in practically every village we entered in the Smolensk area and in White Russia in the winter of 1943 and the spring of 1944. In occupied Russia the killing of Jews continued without protest or respite. A thousand Jews were killed in Bereza Kartuska on July 15, 1942, six hundred at Szarkowszczyzna on July 18. On that day nine hundred managed to escape to nearby forests. On July 20 the Germans launched another anti-partisan operation in White Russia in the Chechowicki forest. That same day in the village of Kletsk several hundred Jews who were about to be murdered set their ghetto on fire and ran for the forest. Most of them were killed by German machine gun fire. A few reached the forest and joined the partisans, where their leader Moshe Fish was killed in a battle with the Germans six months later. On the day after the revolt at Kletsk the Jews at nearby Nieswiez also fought back against their fate. They too were almost all shot down, though one of their leaders, Shalom Cholawski, reached the forest and set up a family camp of Jews who had managed to escape the daily slaughter. They protected their camp against the German manhunts and set up a Jewish partisan unit to harass the German lines of communication.

In January 1943 the Polish ambassador to Britain, Count Rachinski, reported to the parliament that the Germans had already killed over one and a half million Jews in Poland and that something had to be done to stop the destruction of the Jewish people. At the same time a Polish courier, Mr. Karski, was dispatched from Warsaw. He came to see Mr. Roosevelt with a message from the underground and as a witness to the atrocities in his country. After the meeting he asked the president for a message to be given to the leaders in Warsaw. President Roosevelt's reply was to tell them that we will never forget them, we shall win this war and the guilty shall be punished, justice and freedom shall prevail. After Shmuel Sigelbaum, a Jewish member of the Polish parliament in exile in London, heard about the destruction and massacre of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto he committed suicide. In his last note he wrote, "I cannot be silent while my people are being systematically murdered by the Germans. By my death I wish to express my strongest protest. My life belongs to the Jewish people."

On the eastern front behind the German lines, on October 18, 1943 east of the city of Vitebsk Soviet partisans were carrying out strong disruptive activities. The same day south of Vitebsk, in fighting for the city of Melitopol a nineteen year old Red Army lieutenant named Abraham Zindels, who was Jewish, led his men into

one sector of town, destroying twenty-three machine gun points until he ran out of ammunition. The Germans called on him to surrender. He replied by blowing himself up and the Germans who were near him with his last grenade. Lieutenant Zindels was awarded a medal for his death, Hero of the Soviet Union.

Who is to blame for the wrong doing? In April 1944 a South African Air Force reconnaissance plane coming from southern Italy flew at an altitude of 26,000 feet over the I.G. Farben synthetic oil and rubber plant in southern Poland. This plant was located in the town of Monowice, only two and a half miles from Auschwitz. The pilot's pictures covered an area of some six kilometers. The result, was some twenty exposed pictures, three of them of Auschwitz itself. These were the first pictures of Auschwitz. The Monowice report of April 4, 1944 was sent to the American and British air force intelligence. The interpreters found no need to comment on the row of open huts at Auschwitz, which resembled hundreds of other barracks and army camps, nor did these photographs include the gas chambers and the crematoria. It was not until seven weeks later, on May 31, 1944, that Birkenau itself was photographed from the air. And do the gassings and murder continued without interruption. Why there was no attempt made to bomb the railway and crematoria I cannot comprehend. I lost my whole family, relatives, and friends at Auschwitz, and if you have no choice but to die I know they would have chosen to die from a friendly bomb to save more lives and disrupt the daily murder. On May 31, 1944 the South African Air Force made its first real flight over Auschwitz to photograph once more the German synthetic oil plant at Monowice. Two of the frames showed, for the first time, not only the main camp at Auschwitz but also the gas chambers, crematoria, and extensive barracks at Birkenau, where thousands of Jews were being held and more than a million and a half had already been killed. But the barracks and installations at Birkenau were not examined by the photographic reconnaissance unit in Britain, whose only task was to identify as much as possible the oil production process at Monowice and the hell with the humanity.

I was at that time still on Russian territory in White Russia, fighting bitterly with the first Polish division under the command of General Berling, but this time we had the Germans on the run. In September 1944 the first division was under the command of General Berling, with General Zawadski as second in command. After the war General Zawadski became the governor of Upper Silesia.

In June 1944 Jews working as slave laborers for the German war production in the Lodz ghetto were asked to volunteer for labor outside the ghetto. The Germans told them that they were needed for clearing the debris in cities that had been bombed. The first three thousand were to go to Munich. They never reached Munich. Instead, they were all taken to Chelmno where they were gassed the same night.

On the eastern front on June 19, 1944 more than ten thousand demolition

charges were laid by the Soviet partisans. They damaged beyond immediate repair the whole German rail network west of Minsk. On the next two nights forty thousand more charges blew up the railway lines between Vitebsk and Orsza and Plock. This was our front line, starting at Smolensk. This was only a prelude to the summer offensive, which started on June 22, 1944, the third anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. It took us one week to break the two hundred mile front, with a tremendous massacre of the German troops. Tanks, cannon, and thousands of dead horses blocked the roads. With each town and village taken the murders committed by the Germans against the Jews and non-Jews alike were visible, for mass graves were visible everywhere. By July we were on Polish soil, for the first time since September 1939.

But at Auschwitz the killing continued. By June 26 over 381,000 Jews had reached Auschwitz from Hungary alone. In the last six weeks more than a quarter of a million of them were gassed. It was to alert the world that four Jews managed to escape from Auschwitz, with extraordinary luck and courage, and brought news of its gas chambers to the Jews of Slovakia. The Slovakian Jews in turn managed to get the news to neutral Switzerland. From there the terrible details were sent on June 24 to London and Washington, with a special appeal to the allies to bomb the railway lines leading to Auschwitz. One thing I cannot comprehend is that it took four people to get the news out. Didn't anyone realize that millions of people were transported to Poland and none of them came back? You do not need to be a mathematician to figure this out. Finally, on June 26, 1944 the revelation about the mass murder of Jews at Auschwitz was being studied in London and Washington. When on the following day Churchill himself read the report, he wrote to Anthony Eden, asking what could be done. Eden's answer was, "What can be said?" The same plea had just been put to him by two Zionist leaders, Chaim Weizmann, who later became the first President of Israel, and Moshe Shertok. This was a request for the bombing of the railway lines, the same as was requested in the telegram from Switzerland on June 24. Churchill's reply was sympathetic and immediate: get anything you can out of the air force, and invoke my name if you need to. The response to Churchill's request was negative. The British air ministry was skeptical about losing British airmen's lives for what one official noted in the secrecy of his departmental correspondence, was no purpose. The bombing would have to be done in daylight. In Washington the American Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy, rejected four separate appeals to bomb the lines. His instructions upon getting each request were, as his deputy noted, "kill this". The deportations and murder continued without interruption.

On July 2 as bombs were falling on Budapest, the Americans dropped leaflets over the city informing the authorities in Hungary that the American government was closely following the persecution of the Jews with extreme gravity and warning that all those responsible for carrying out orders to persecute Jews would be punished. Within forty-eight hours of the dropping of the leaflets by the Americans the Hungarian leader Admiral Horthy informed the Germans that the deportations

would have to stop. This was all as a result of publicity given to the report by the four escapees from Auschwitz. Protests had been sent to Admiral Horthy by the International Red Cross, the King of Sweden, and Pope Pius XII. The Germans, whose deportations depended on the support of the Hungarian police and railway workers, had no choice but to stop the deportations temporarily. A total of 437,000 Hungarian Jews had already been deported, but 170,000 were saved from deportation. On July 24, despite Horthy's order, fifteen hundred Jews were taken away and sent to Auschwitz that day. No punishment came to those who issued this order.

Jews had lived in Poland for over a thousand years. Before the war Jews were ten percent of the population of Poland. The leader of the powerful right wing National Democratic Party, Roman Dumowski, declared that this was eight percent too many. In 1935 Marshal Josef Pilsudski died. He was a true democrat and protector of all minorities, especially the Jews. After his death a new government took over and the reactionaries were in power. At the top was General Smigly-Rydz. The president was Professor Moscicki, and the foreign minister was Josef Beck. In 1937 the foreign minister Josef Beck stated that Poland had three and a half million Jews but that there was only room for half a million. Therefore, he said, three million Jews had to leave. After the war, as we know now, only about a quarter of a million Polish Jews survived. All in all only about twenty-five thousand survived this terrible holocaust in Poland itself; the rest were saved in Russian forced labor camps in Siberia. I was one of these, as were former Israeli Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Itzhak Shamir and many other prominent people. They were only two hundred kilometers away from me. From 1937 on Jewish ghettos or segregation was established at Polish universities, and Jews from then on had to sit separately, not with their colleagues and countrymen. Those who disobeyed were badly harmed and abused.

Even after the liberation of some parts of eastern Poland the surviving Jews were persecuted by some of the Poles. In the village of Sokoly people who had survived the camps started to come home. Of them were seven Jews including a four year old orphan girl. All seven were murdered by someone from the village, who did not want them there, in fear that some of the survivors might reclaim their property. That was the mentality of pre-war Poland, living and breathing hatred for no reason at all. You cannot say that all Polish people were like that. As the saying goes, one rotten apple spoils the barrel. When our first division had returned to Poland to the city of Siedlice, some seventy-five kilometers from Warsaw in May 1945 the same thing occurred in Lublin. Five survivors were killed, including one woman. From that day on the army was on the move to look out for those responsible for those acts of terror. Bitter fights ensued in nearby forests. I lost in this manner a very close friend with whom I had spent the war years. We had been on many dangerous missions together. He was a Pole. He received a pass to see his parents back home near the city of Bialystok. He had not seen them since 1939. He had been taken prisoner of war by Russia since 1939. He was murdered by

someone in the village. A delegation from our battery attended his funeral.

Bochnia in World War II

In the 1939 campaign the Polish army was able to put up a good stand around the city for five days, sustaining heavy losses to the enemy. The Polish army was under the command of General Spiechowicz and Tank Brigade Commander General Maczka. After bitter fighting they had to retreat west to the River Doniec, near the Rumanian border, and eventually cross over to Rumania, then France, and finally Britain. The Germans had not forgotten the casualties they sustained in Bochnia so on December 20, 1939, shortly after they occupied it, they shot fifty-five people. I don't know how many Jews were among them. The execution was conducted because a student was accused of killing a German policeman. This was the first time that the Germans established a group murder of the population for disobeying occupation rules. The majority of the Jewish population was murdered at Auschwitz, only about eighty kilometers away. The older people were shot seven kilometers away in a forest village called Baczkow, a familiar place to me. In childhood years we picked mushrooms and blueberries there.

During the occupation partisans were very active in the area and during the night of February 25-26, 1943 they demolished a railroad train, disrupting traffic for twenty hours. This sabotage was carried out by three partisans named Zbigniew Kacki, Stanislaw Smajda, and Andrej Wiecha. Finally, on January 21, 1945 the city was liberated by the Russian Fourth Ukrainian Front, under the command of General Ivan Y. Petrow.

Four kilometers from the square, traveling in a northerly direction with the Proszowki road you cross the river Raba over a bridge and are in the recreational village of Proszowki, where I spent my childhood years with my parents and four brothers. In my later years we moved to the city, but our school was always in the city. That meant walking to and from school each day, plus religious instruction on Sunday. Traveling in a northwesterly direction a large forest stretched endlessly. About three kilometers from the river there is a small farm village named Baczkow. In the southern part of this village, opposite a flat land named Gorki, in the southwestern direction there is a road named Krulewska, or Kings Road in English. Going deeper into the forest, approximately eight hundred meters from the flat land in a northeasterly direction there is a spot where about fifteen hundred elderly Jews and five hundred Poles from all over Bochnia were murdered by the Germans. The victims' resting place in the forest holds five large graves. There is a memorial plate written in Hebrew and Polish, dedicated to the victims. It includes the date on which these atrocities occurred, August 22, 1942. I was able to translate this information from a book called *Ziemia-Bochenska* (pages 45). The name of this famous forest is Puszcza-Niepolomnicka. It was known for wild boars, buffaloes, and other wild animals. The German rulers treated the population with complete disregard for human life. After the war I was able to learn that indeed my grandparents were among the people murdered in that forest, along with thousands of other innocent people.

This city is beautifully located in a picturesque location in the state of Krakow. During the occupation this territory was neglected and roads were left to deteriorate. The city is located in a valley, surrounded to the north by heights named Solna-Gora, which were 292 meters high. Solna-Gora was surrounded by small houses. The majority of the population was Jewish. During the occupation the Nazis created a ghetto there, and surrounded it with barbed wire. To the east are the Kolanow Heights, 262 meters high, to the south are the Uzborna Heights, 245 meters high, and to the west are the Krzeczow Heights, 307 meters high. Through the city flows a stream called Babica, where at one time my grandparents lived. I spent many happy days with them. This stream ends up in the big river Raba. All around the city you were surrounded by fruit orchards and many narrow streets and wide stone roads. The center of the city had many landmark buildings going back for centuries. There were old churches, synagogues, schools, universities, and parks. There were three major religions practiced there, Catholic, Evangelical, and Jewish. The majority of the population was Catholic. The Jews were divided into ultra Orthodox and Orthodox (similar to our Conservative today). Our family was in this second group. Religion was taught in the schools and each religion had its own teachers. Jewish kids also attended Hebrew classes after school and on Sunday.

The last time I was in my home town was June 1945, after I returned from active duty following the end of the war. Our home was demolished, a very sad feeling indeed. The synagogue my parents belonged to was still there but it had been converted for some kind of business or storage use. It was a large, beautiful building built just before my Bar Mitzvah. I did not go inside. It was just too painful. The city itself sustained no damage after the invasion nor during the liberation by the Soviet Army in 1945. Only the Jewish homes were destroyed.



My own translation from a booklet written in 1967, and published by the graphic art publishing house for the State of Krakow, with the permission of the State information centers of the tourist and recreational committee in the State Capital Krakow entitled "The Land Of Bochnia".

City Bochnia borders on Two State Lines, State of Krakow to the South, and Kielce to the South-West.

Just a short history of the City Bochnia;

This region goes back to the 400 B.C. In the beginning of 400 B.C. iron ore was discovered in the vicinity, and along the banks of the River Raba located 3klm from the center of the city. During that period this part of the State was ruled by the Romans, and official money were Roman coins.

There were also traces of Roman money in nearby towns of Bedno, Leskowice, Targowisko, and Zegociny. The first major sign of people in the vicinity of Bochnia were seen by the middle of 600 B.C. The first Slovak people were discovered during the year 1250 and they were called then Slovak-Propolski. During the 600 B.C. a discovery of arabic money circulating in the City Bochnia. All this information came during Aharcheology dig in the year 1250. The Aharcheology discovery also revealed human inhabitants were in the vicinity of the River-Valley in the Southeast part of the County, according to various publications from that era.

By the 12th Century polish Slovaks began to govern this territory, and this area started to develop rapidly, This territory was governed by Kings and the territory was split in two parts, the kingdom of Krakow region, and people of Malopolski, governed by Grifitow. The largest growth of Population occurred during the end of 12th century, until the end of 14th. The largest influx of newcomers were from Germany.

During that period poland was governed by a very popular King named Kazimierz Wielki, who had a Democratic point of view, and was responsible for bringing Jews back to Poland after a 200 year exile. He had the foresight to import Jews from Germany, and some of them occupied high positions in his Kingdom, and the economy reached the highest point, and thru the 14th century. During that time the area developed tremendously. Over 121 Towns and Cities were developed. In the 15th, 16th, & 17th century 44 Towns & cities were developed. During, and in-between those years all kinds of invasions took place, among them the Swedish one in the 17th, century. In 1581, 20,250 people were living in the vicinity of bochnia, with 27 % per square klm. In that period according to the records, Bochnia was the most important City in the area. During the year 1198 it was known for its recreational facilities including large Spas.

In the year 1253, King Boleslaw wstidliwy allowed Germans from Silesia to relocate to Bochnia, soon after they were the majority and they renamed Bochnia to Saltzberg for its Salt Mine. This City is located on cross-roads to Hungary. In 1321, king Wladislaw Lokietek removed taxes inside the Country. When King Kazimierz Wielki came to power in 1337, he adopted the City, and took upon himself to rebuilt it. He build a beautiful square named Rinek. He also build the main Cathedral in 1357, and the largest and best equipped hospital named Saint Cross build especially for injured miners. My Father was recuperating from his wounds suffered in 1916 from the Russians during World War One. All these Buildings are still there, and Bochnia became the largest City in Malopolski (Smaall Poland) at the same time emigrants from Italy, most of them famous merchands were invited to trade their products for salt. By the year 1388, this territory reached the highest standard of living.

A Dominican Cloister with a Church was built in the middle of 14th cent and at the same time Academy for Priests opened its doors with sixty students in attendance. The academy was associated with the Jagielonien University in Krakow 33 klm away, one of the oldest Universities in Europe. In the year 1507, the City burned down. There are no records of what had caused the fire. King Zigmunt Stary ruled the Country. To ease the econo-

mic situation he canceled tax collections for the next Eight years. After that a special taxtariff was imposed for the export of wine to Hungary. The money collected was used to repair roads.

By the 16th century Mr. Severin Boner completed rebuilding the City. By 1581, Bochnia was the largest City in Malopolski {Small Poland}, with 4,500 ton production of salt yearly. After the Castle was rebuild in the first half of 16th century, river Raba overflowed, which was normal for that River to do even in my days, which occurred in 1936, and a lot of miseries people suffered years to come, which all kinds of epidemics which followed. In the 16th century, Fires followed the flood. During the 1652-53 the Swedish invesion caused fires, famine & diseases which took 2,000 lives. by the year 1665 there were still 2160 people living there. With the loss of agriculture, and businesses the standard of living dropped, education fell to its lowest point, religious discrimination flourished. A decree was declared by King Zigmunt the 3rd, to get rid of all Jews from his kingdom, and also from Bochnia, where Jews had lived there since the First Century. Sounds familiar dosed, somehow nothing change there. The Jew was always the scapegoat. In the 17th century the Russian Czars Army invaded with a ram page, burning 30 women alive.

During the Norther War Swedish, king Karol the 12th, and his soldiers occupied City Bochnia, and his Army went on a uncontrollable robbery ram-page, and raping spree. during the occupation of King August Sasa the 2nd, in 1707, the City suffered from starvation and illnesses. In 1710-11 more then 2,000 people died from all kinds of epidemics. In spite of very extensive damadge, by the middle of the 18th, century the City revived.

In early 1768 Bochnia had three oppsing forces. In 1771 the Russians, commanded by Gen. Syvarow also become occupiers. In 1772 the area was under Austrian occupation, and in June 1772 the Austrian reached an a agreement and Bochnia was under the Austrian rule, and was annexed in to Galicia, becoming the Capital of the region. Now as a County it had jurisdiction over 13 Cities, two villages, and 517 hamlets. By 1783 this region had 151,000 people, increasing to 247,000 by 1846. The Austrian Government came to conclusion, that the area was developing to slow, so they started to colonize this region with Germans.

By the year 1847, 2864 Germans were living in Bochnia. the main industries were Farming & Salt mining. Polish patriotism was always on peoples minds. Polish soldiers were serving in the Austrian Armies that included the Jews. Upon the onset of action for revolution mass desertion to the Polish ranks occurred. One of the well known heroes was Gen. Tadeusz

Kosciuszko. But after his failure in the "Krakow uprising in 1794", citizens of Bochnia took active part in forming a Polish Legion in Italy, under the command of a home grown patriot Gen. Jan Henry Dombrowski born Sept. 29, 1775. His name is a part of the Polish National Anthem to this day. His Legion was ready to fight for freedom by the year 1797, fully supported with money by the Legions organizers.

Before 800 B.C. the terrain of Bochnia was a dense jungle forest, with large trees and wild animals. The only clear land was near the River, and that area was cultivated with various kinds of fruit orchards.

At the same time existed a direct road connecting city Krakow with Hungary, and the discovery of Rock Salt was made in Bochnia.

During the Austrian occupation in the 1830,s Galicia had a very active political life. In 1835 the Polish National Organization the {SLP} was found in the City of Krakow. This organization eventually changed its name to the Confederation of Polish Nations with Headquarters in the town of Pawlowice, near Bochnia, and I been there many times with my father. This organization had the most radical organizers, many were University students & professors. After they were discovered by the Austrian Authorities, many were arrested and expelled from the Universities for their activities. However, the expulsions did not stop secret organizing.

In 1844 under the direction of Mr. Edward Dembowski, and 150 individuals from various occupations, students, soldiers and intellectuals. In a large group of unknown people, there is always a possibility of a squeler, and there was no exception to this group, in this case it was a priest, Father Owsinski from the town of Krulowki, he informed the Austrian Authorities, as the result was Five top leaders were arrested and sentences ran 10-11 years in jail. In 1846 Governor Karl Bwrendt anticipated trouble from farmers, so he had promised them all kinds of things, and spread falsehood about his opposition, that hatred developed into serious trouble among farmers, and over 200 people lost their lives. The Governor was removed from office. His successor Walenty Madurewicz was very actively persuasive to the farmers, but opposition was still present.

Meanwhile in the Jungles of Niepolomnice, Eleven klm South from Bochnia, 800 partizans staged an attack March 24-25 in 1846, destroying whole Company of Austrian soldiers. This insurrection lasted thru 1847-48 the end result was capitulation of the Austrian Government in Galicia.

During the spring of 1847, cities & towns suffered from hunger epidemics. The year 1848 had brought to Galicia new Social & Economic changes. Land owners, invited the so-called "Charist Patent" in Nov. 1848, which they intended to give some land to the farmers for their own use, along with cooperations between owners and farmers.

During the revolution, the Austrian Army suffered devastating losses, dealt them by France & Prussia, and caused them to change drastically the administrative laws in the entire territory of Galicia. By this move the County was substantially reduced to 877 Sq. klm, with population of 72,000, including 157, farm villagers, five cities including 853 people from Lipnica-

Morowa, Niepolomice 4332, Uscie -Solne 1454, Nowy-Wisnicz , 3565 and Bochnia, 10,291 , people. by giving autonomy to the people of Galicia, a new political life was born by the end of 19th,centuary.

Uprising from the {PSL} Democratic Party in Galicia and Slavic-Silesia was directed by the peoples front. All farmers were represented by Attorney Franciszek Bardl, from Krakow. Education in Bochnia in yera 1869 was as fallows; One four class school, one three class school, Twelve two class school, with a total attendance of 2,649 students,among them 1,015 girls, and 1,634 boys, that was the highest percent in that region, 47 %. according to the records a total of 5,581 school age children were in the area. In 1817, a six class college was established in Bochnia by Priest,Pius Riegera., and by 1851,one Eight class College was there, and one four Class College. Because education drained parents financially,there was a drop of students attendance. Sounds familiar doesn't. In 1826, 291 college students attended classes, and in 1854 only 64 were left, to to the financial hardship. The majority teachers & professors were from Chechoslowakia.

In 1887,a Library was founded by 158 townspeople from different social back grounds with some 650 books on the shelves. Lectures and concerts were also conducted. in all, Nine additional libraries were in the area. Tremendous education effords were stressed, in 1888, under the direction of the Minister of Education, a Five class college opened up, and in 1892,for the first time graduation tests were conducted at the University., and future generation of famous Polish Men were among them like histori-ans Jan Ptasznik, Karol Piotrowicz, Kazimierz Kaczmarczyk, and many more. During the firs half of the 19th century, the majority of teachers were German & Chechoslowakian. The German Government was forcing their nationals to germanise the Universities, hoping to achive national gains, but the teachers would not go along with that directive,and many denounced their Citizenship, among them Franciszek Hoshard who later was elected to the Polish Congress,Edmund Neusser a famous Professor of medicine in Vienna, Geology Prof. Gesh Bukowski who eventually retired in Bochnia and died there the same year as my Father in 1937.

The University built their own dormitory in 1909, and 40 students lived there, supported partly with scholarships,and private donations during years 1905-10. All kind of educational courses were given to officers and soldiers from the 13th, regiment stationed in Bochnia, that was my fathers regiment , from 1914 to 1919. By the order from Vienna education was stressed among the soldiers to eliminate illiteracy.. by Kaiser , Franz Josef of Austria. Poland then was in the middle of two giants, the Austrian Empire and Russian Empire. Polish people were yearning to nacheive Independen-ce. Secretly , and openly organizations were formed among the students,

sport clubs, fraternities. Soldiers started to train under their own command.

In 1913, the Austrian army was under continued pressure from the Russians, and on Nov. 26, 1914, the Russian Army invaded, and occupied City Bochnia. On December 15, 1914, War erupted, between the two military giant Empires. The Austrians were forced to retreat from our City 's including Krakow, Biala & Gorlice sustaining heavy losses on the battlefield and loss of prestige and mistrust by Poles. This situation caused the Austrians to oppress the people.

Political arrests were conducted, and over night the Polish people became the enemy, and were blamed for the Austrian losses at the front lines. There are no records how many casualties were sustained by the people of Bochnia during World War One. Names of five Prof. and 52 students were placed on the University's Memorial Wall for giving their lives for freedom and liberty. This Memorial was still there when I came back home after the War in June 1945. Among the casualties was my Father, Herman Storch, who enlisted in 1914, and served in the Austrian Army, in the 13th Regiment stationed in Bochnia. He served as a Officer, he sustained serious wounds on the Russian front in 1917, it took him over a year to recuperate. In 1918 Polish Gen. Jozef Pilsudski settled the score with the Russian driving them back from Poland all the way to Kiev and inflicting heavy losses on them.

Bochnia today is still a county seat for this region and is under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Krakow, with 876/7 square klm. The County has Two Cities and Eleven Villages. The 1931 census conducted had shown that 113,790 people lived there at the time. Census also showed that 80,879 were employed, 32,911 were farmers & agricultural related industries, 10,033 Salt Mine & industry, 4,054 security, communication transport. At the same time there were approximately 1,700 unemployed, from that 1,200 mine related, 15 industry, and the rest were farmers. Unfortunately all Jews from Bochnia are gone, Only a handful survived the Holocaust, or the Russian labor Camps, Partisans and regular Army.

World War Two

During the 1939 campaign the Polish Army was able to put a good stand for five days around the City Bochnia while sustaining casualties, at the same time inflicting heavy losses to the Enemy. The Polish Forces were under command of Gen. Spiechowicz, and Tank Brigade Commander Gen. Maczka. After bitter fighting the Army retreated to the River Doniec near the Rumanian border, and eventually crossed the River to Rumania then on to France, and Britain. The same Army took part years later in the European campaign in Italy, Monte Casino, France, Germany on the ground and in the air.

The Germans had not forgotten the casualties they had sustained during Sept, 1939 in Bochnia, so shortly after occupation, on Dec 20, 1939 they shot 55 people. I don't know how many Jews were among them. The execution was conducted because a student was accused of killing a German Policeman. This was the first time the Germans established a group murder on population for disobeying occupation rules.

The majority of the Jewish population were murdered in {Oswiecim} Auschwitz and Belzobuth camps about 80 klm away. Older people, among them my Grandparents were shot 7 klm away in a forest in the Village of Baczko, a familiar place to me. Before the war my Brothers and I picked mushrooms & blueberries there. During the occupation Partisans were very active in the area, and during the night of Feb. 25-26, 1943 they demolished a railroad train disrupting traffic for 20 hours. This sabotage was carried out by three Partisans, Zbigniew Kacki, Stanislaw Smajda & Andrej Wiecha. Finally on Jan. 21, 1945 the City was liberated by the Fourth Ukrainian Front under the command of Gen. Ivan Y. Petrov.

Four klm from the City square, traveling in northerly direction on the Proszowki road, you would cross River Raba over a wooden bridge and you are in a recreational Village of Proszowki, where I had spend my happy childhood Years with my parents and my brothers. My school was located in the City three klm away. Each day rain, snow or shine I had to walk to and from school, including religious instructions.

Traveling in a north-westerly direction a large forest stretches endlessly. About three klm from the River, a small farming Village named Baczko is there. In the Southern part of the Village opposite a flat land

named "Gurki" walking South-Western direction ,there are Mass Graves where over 1.500 elderly Jews and over 500 Poles from Bochnia and its vicinity were murdered by the Nazis during the occupation from 1939-1945. There are five large graves where the victims are buried. there is a Memorial Plaque and a Monument erected by the City of Bochnia, written in Hebrew and Polish, and dedicated to the Memory of the Victims, indicating the dates when the murders occurred. The Jewish Victims were murdered in August 22, 1942. After the War I was told that indeed my grandparents and some relatives are among the victims.

The name of this famous forest is Puszcza-Niepolomicka known for wild Boars, Buffaloes and other wild animals in this region.

The City Bochnia is beautifully located in a pictorial scene in the State of Krakow. During the occupation this territory was neglected and the roads were left to decay & rot. The City is located in a valley , surrounded in the North with pictures heights named Solna-Gora, 292 meters high.

Solna Gora was surrounded with small homes. The majority of population living there were Jews. During the German occupation the Nazis created a Ghetto and surrounding it with barbed wires. to the East are the Kolanow Heights 262 meter to the South the Usborna 245 meter High, to the West Krzeczko 307 meter high. Thru the City flows a stream named Babica where at one time my grandparents used to live there.,and I spent many happy days with them.

All around the City you were surrounded with fruit orchards and many narrow and wide stone & brick roads. the center of the City was surrounded with Landmark Buildings, dating back centuries. We had there Churches, Synagogues, Schools, Universities, and Parks. The population of the City was 20.000 divided in to three religions, 1.000 Evangelical, 2.500 Jews, and 16.500 Catholic. The Jewish religion was divided in to two sections Ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox, compared to present Conservative. Religion was taught in schools, each denomination had their own religious instructors. Jewish kids also attended Hebrew School.

The last time I was in my home town, was the first week of June 1945, upon returning from the War. My First Polish Division was stationed 75 klm West from Warsaw. It was a sad return. No one knew that I was alive, and not single member of my family was alive. Our home was demolished, The City itself sustained no damage during the liberation in January 1945, except that most Jewish homes were demolished.

My definition of hate is ignorance , lack of respect toward another human being, or any being created by God. It cannot be ignored or tolerated however small it may look to us .As past history has shown,a small fire eventually becomes uncontrollable.

So it was in Germany, ignorance, naivete, and tolerance enabled the Nazi regime to surge forward with a plan for the destruction of Jews,Gipsies,intellectuals and all other minoritys in the occupied countries of Europe by the Germans,especially in Poland and in Russia.

If the free world would have intervened on October 15,1938, when the German Government suddenly decided to get rid of all the Jews born in Poland , and those living in Germany for generations,obeying all the laws of that Country, simply and virtually with out any belongings or money brought them to the Polish borders in upper Silesia shooting over their hats. For days they were stranded outside in freezing rain, and the Polish Government would not let them in , among them was my future wife,who was born and educated in Germany. The world stood by in silence and the doors were wide open for the tragedy wich followed on Nov, 9,1938 the beginning of Holocaust started with " Kristalnacht " when over 250 synagogues were set afire , Jews in Germany were kiled and thousands send to concentration camps of Dachau,Sachsenhausen & others.

Safe in the silence of the rest of the World , the destruction of European

Jews begin. One should remember that the population of Germany in 1938 was 66,000,000 with about 550,000 Jews~~Jews~~ only. So as you can see ,small fire of a group cannot be ignored. While in school I did not suffer any injustice from my fellow christian students,and was able to participate in sports events in school , but you would come across a bully throwing at you antisemitic slurs. Fortunately I have never been harmed bodily. Our Citys population was 20,000 among them 2,500 Jews. In our City Jews had lived among our Christian neighbors since the 400 BC

Prelude to Hate Poland 1930. The right wing National Democratic Party had a powerful leader in the 1930'S . Jews occupied 10% of the population. jews were living in Poland for thousands of years . The leader of the National Democratic Party, Mr. Dumowski "declared" that this is 8 % to many of them.

In 1935 the leader of the Polish Government Marshal Jozef Pilsudski died. He was a true democrat, and protector of all minorities, especially the Jews. After his death a new government was in power and the reactionaries took over.

At the top was General Smigly--Ritz, President, Professor Ignacy Moscicki, Foreign minister, Jozef Beck, and Church Leader Cardinal Glomb.

In 1937 the Polish foreign Minister Jozef Beck stated, I remember it well, with my father becoming very upset with that statement by Mr. Beck who said that in Poland we have 3,500,000 Jews among us, and Poland has only room for only 500,000, therefore 3,000,000 has to leave Poland now. After the War in 1945, as we know now, only about 250,000 survived only 25,000 had survived the Holocaust in Poland about 160,000 were saved in the slave labor camps of Siberia U.S.S.R. and the rest died fighting Nazis in the Forests and on the battle field in the Polish Army.

Since 1937 Jewish segregation was established at Polish Universities, and Jewish students had to sit segregated from their Gentile colleagues. Because the Government, and the Church stood by ignoring schools regulations the doors were wide open for the incoming Holocaust & Extermination Camps in Poland.

MAJDANEK EXTERMINATION CAMP
CITY LUBLIN, POLAND, 7 / 23/1944

The story of Extermination Camp Majdanek, has not perhaps been fully told. Majdanek was the First Extermination Camp Liberated, and fully operational when I had entered it on a hot day July 23, 1944. As we advanced, I learned of enormous atrocities by the German Army, with a large number of killings spread over a wide area in White Russia which added far more than Majdanek, it did not have the past monumental industrial death factory, just two miles from a large historical City of Lublin, once a Capital of Poland, and the cradle of Jewish learning.

I entered this Camp unaware what was going on there, I, and the rest of my soldiers assumed that this was a military camp, or a factory. We had no warning of it, and we were not prepared for the sight which followed. Let me describe what I have seen as a frontline soldier which took part in Liberating Three Death Camps in Poland, and One Concentration Camp located only 35 km from the German Capital Berlin. Now I will single out the first one "Majdanek". To the best of my knowledge Majdanek was erected in latter part of 1942.

You can't possibly imagine the devastating impact it has on a frontline soldier upon entering factory like buildings and discovering that the facility was a Death Camp, where over 1,500,000 innocent men, women and children from all over the Europe lost their lives, including 5,000 Polish Jewish Soldiers held near by prisoner of war camp. What I have seen upon entering this Camp was; a large Building, as I remember there was a sign pointing to a "Bad Und Desinfection" {sanitary and bath house} the inside of this Barrack was made of concrete, with benches all around the room. In the next rooms were large Square Concrete Structures without windows, with a small skylight in the ceiling I think that there were Six Rooms on each site, with heavy steel doors, each door had a small inspection peephole.

Between the two large buildings were dozens of similar light green Barracks, filled with apparel, luggage, and personal belongings. You had to pass dozens same type of Barracks on the way to a crematorium at the other end, as I recall, perhaps half km. away. On this sad assignment I also saw Warehouses of Boots, Shoes and Little Shoes by the thousands all sorted out to perfection German style. Little farther down the road was an enormous Mountain of White Ashes with small bones. We had orders to rush back, but not before I had to investigate this large structure with tall chimneys which turn out to be the Crematorium with Six or Seven enormous furnaces, full of human bodies and bones still in them.

After this scene the first thought came to my mind who were those people in those furnaces, and why they were there. Many thoughts ran thru my mind. Perhaps those remains were my own family. We did not know to this point about Extermination Camps. And what did I do that moment came spontaneous. I recited the prayer for the death, and all soldiers assembled did the same.

To this day , this picture is in front of my eyes . After leaving that inferno I faced another one about two /klm away was the frontline. So all of us had to recover instantly and concentrate for a long road ahead, and pry that we will survive, and remember what we had seen there.

It was a very long , cruel, and tragic war. I had lost my entire family friend and schoolmates. Painful as it is I decided to inform as many as I can reach, so that those kind of atrocities should never happen again to any human being on this earth, and that we all should live in peace and harmony with our fellow Human.

About January 23,1945 we liberated a small town of Chelmno in the North-Westernpart of Poland located between the cities of Ludz - Bydgoszcz and Torun-on the Narew River. This town is located on a direct line, and short distance away from the German - Polish Border.

In this small town the destruction of European Jews began on December , 7, 1941. The mass killing of Jews from near by towns , by gas, took place in "Chelmno". At the time of liberation 350,000 Jews lost their lives in the most cruel way. Only two young boys were liberated to bare witness.

CITY OF ORANIENBURG ,GERMANY

CONCENTRATION CAMP SACHSENHAUSEN, APRIL 20, 1945.

April 19,1945 we occupied this city of about 25,000 after bitter fighting with heavy losses to this point, my unit entered a large facility, assuming it to be a large manufacturing complex. To our dismay it was the Concentration Camp "Sachsenhausen" located just about 50 klm. from the German Capital City Berlin and the Nazi Headquarters "the Reichstag" here all the planning and implementing of the destruction of human lives began. The end result was about Fifty Five Million people lost their lives.

This was the first time for me that I was actually involved liberating human beings alive, even though barely so.

My estimation came to about 2,000 majority of them were women from all over Europa, and in deplorable condition, afraid, incoherent, crying uncontrollably. Having had the knowledge of Four languages, I was able to communicate with them. According to their testimony some of them were there a long time with having been transported & marched on foot from Poland in the last months of the War.

We stabilized the situation as best we could, gave inmates all our food and water, assured them of their safety inspected the facility until when the administrative unit took it over, and my unit returned to the front lines, hoping and praying that I, and the rest of my men will survive and remember what we had seen in this horrible place Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen.

What I have seen there was; Crematories, specially erected hooks on the walls, and posts with human bodies still on them in full view. A special shooting gallery where victims were laying dead and full of blood. I also saw complete manufacturing plants intact, producing all kinds of parts for the war industry, making uniforms for the German Army, hundreds of pure white rabbits {fat & groomed, and people starving to death. These sights are still with me to this day.

Hundreds of Thousands of people from all over Europa, including Germany lost their lives there among them Gentiles, Jews, Gypsies, Homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, and prisoners of War. They were brought from all over the occupied countries, worked till they could no longer to do so, and then sent to the Crematories.

There were strict orders not to harm any prisoners of war in our hands. I had interrogate civilians living on the outside, and they insisted of knowing absolutely nothing of what was going on behind the walls of Sachsenhausen. The people of Oranienburg were high class educated people, they had seen daily transports arriving and none of them leaving that dreadful place. You don't have to be a genius to figure out where the people went. Our soldiers apprehended two SS officers who were hiding, and short time later they were gone. You have to understand when in situation I described, things will go out of control, and there is nothing any one can do.

There is another factor to that. While we were advancing, soldiers tried to compose themselves. Each of us knew then that the end was nearing but it was not insight. But Sachsenhausen was only 50 km from Berlin, and people were still murdered there the same day we entered the facility. Twelve days later Berlin Capitulated. This Camp was left to the administrative unit, and I moved on in the direction of Berlin, just 50 km south. That was the last time I had seen Sachsenhausen.

After the War I came across a few people who were inmates of Sachsenhausen one of them from Suffern, NY who survived with his older brother that Camp. He was from Poland, taken to Auschwitz at the age of 8, held there until Jan 1945 sent to Sachsenhausen, until March 1945, from there to Bergen Belsen, finally liberated by the British troops in April 1945.

Oranienburg is a very cultural City, a suburb of Berlin, and yet this City was almost intact. To this day I cannot comprehend why nothing had been done to disturb the regular supply of people sent there for destruction.

It is a mystery to me.

Fifty Five year ago on October 12, 1943 for the first time in the Polish history, the First Infantry Division named Tadeusz Kosciuszko from the first Polish Army had its first military engagement on the U.S.S.R. Territory, and so began glorious beginning for the First Division Soldiers, but it was not cheap, as always for freedom you pay the price. My first military action took place Oct, 12, 1943 and lasted two days in the town of Lenino, vicinity of Mohylewo, Bialorus Region of Smolensk.

This event was recorded in the annuals of the Polish history books, as the first successful military engagement by the Polish Army on the USSR territory in World War Two. The First Division was under the command of Gen. Zigmund Berling.

The First Division was incorporated with the USSR 33rd Army on the main Western Front. Our assignment was to break the German defence lines in the vicinity of Lenino to close the exit to the river Dniepr 22 km from the front lines. and seize a beachhead on the other side of river Dniepr.

The German Army had excellent entrenchments, and easy to defend positions along the largest swamps in Europe stretching along the River Mierej, in the depth of 40 km (22 miles). On that day I was a Goner in a 82 millimeter Mortar company, with the Non-Commissioned Academy.

On the early cold morning of Oct 12, 1943 in a foreign Country, once bitter enemy of Poland the First Polish Division comprised of Three infantry regiments, One Artillery, regiment, one 122 mi. mortar regiment, four 82 mil. companies, we were able to break through the German defense positions in the depth of 2-5-4 km, crossing the Swamps in the vicinity of the Mierej river.

Due to bad terrain we did not have any Tank support which was vital in any offensive operation, in this case they would have sunk in the swamp with heavy losses to men and machines. The Soviet units could not budge from their positions, so the main part of the attack fell on the First Division soldiers. After Six hours of heavy fighting my unit occupied Village of Polzuchy, and fought back gallantly two German contra-attacks, we continued the attacks on the Village of Lenino. Unfortunately after a German strong contra-attack, we could not hold all the territory including Lenino.

On October 13, 1943 my first Division resumed the attack on the enemy, but strong contra-attacks by the German units from the ninth army, and from the air I received orders to disengage from the enemy and relinquish some positions. On Oct. 18, 1943 we interrupted the offensive, and reinforced the division. This front line continued to change hands until June 1944, when under the direction of the First White Russian front Commander Marshal Konstantine Rokossowski who was Polish born in Russia. The offensive resumed the first week of June for good.

The Polish soldiers who fought in Lenino received high praises from the top

Soviet high Command. This was a bloody maiden engagement. The First Infantry Division on Sept. 1st. 1943 on the day I left the training Camp we had about 13,000 soldiers we lost 3,000 from the 12 to 18 Oct. 1943, among them the only Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Hershel Zawada, and 56 other Jewish soldiers. I was among the lucky ones my company had 45 casualties, 25 fatalities, on the happier note I was awarded with my first medal, a special Cross for Lenino, and I am very proud of it.

Now time is ticking away, not to many of my comrades in arms survived the slaughter from Oct 12, 1943 to May 2nd 1945. To best of my knowledge at the end of War in 1945, there were only 256 original soldiers from the First Division who came out without a scratch from the War. At a special ceremony in October 1945, I received a oversized certificate after my discharge in Katowice, Poland from a high ranking official. Because of the size I did not take it along on my departure from Poland in Feb. 1946. I wish I did.

Politic played a big role in Russia, as far as Polish citizens in Soviet Slave labor camps in Siberia. There were about 2,00,000 Polish people who fell to the Soviet oppression between September 1939 and June 1941 many of the Prisoners of war. After Germany declared war on Soviet Union, an agreement was reached between Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin and Gen. Wladislaw Sikorski the chief of the Polish Forces in Britain. Soon after Polish citizens were released from Siberian labor camps, a Polish Army started to organize in the vicinity of Kulbiskow -- Saratow on the Volga River not far from Stalingrad. Progress was very slow, first we had to come to ourselves get on the feet. None of us was ready for military duty, and we were not mentally prepared and fit for Army service, in a Country that had given us a lot of grief. Within a short time the situation had changed, after the swearing in ceremony, by then all of us had their assignments and motive.

Myself, my only aim was to get home, see my family then if need be continue with the liberation of our Country not knowing about the situation at home and what to expect.

According to rumors we supposed to have fought on the Eastern and Western fronts as soon as the units were ready. As I found out later the situation change

drastically when two divisions left Russia via Iran late summer 1942. In all about 140,000 including families left. After that the borders were closed, and no one was allowed to travel without a permit from the NKVD.

In November 1942, I was notified by the Polish authorities in Kulbiskow USSR that again there will be a formation of the First Volunteer Polish Division, and it will fight only on the Eastern Front. When the War ended in 1945, 500,000 Polish soldiers bare arms.

A short history of the First Polish Division

The first Polish Division was named the *Tadeusz Kosciuszko* division. One of the high officers in General Anders' army was Colonel Zigmund Berling, another survivor of the Katyn Forest Massacre of 1940. Colonel Berling refused to depart with General Anders to the middle east. He declared that the shortest way back to Poland was through the eastern front.

And so, a Polish army started to form again, and all the recriminations were becoming ancient history, so to speak, but not ancient of consequence. What was of immediate interest now was the development of Russian policy and trust towards the other Poland, and the progress of the new Polish Division, which was named *Tadeusz Kosciuszko*.

The new division's camp was in a beautiful pine forest along the Oka River, about two thirds of the way from Moscow to Razan. My regiment trained in the village of Diwovo, in the heart of Great Russia. The last time a Polish soldier had been in this part of Russia was 1612, in the days of Ivan Susanin.

The most moving ceremony took place on July 16, 1943, and it took over two hours. Since Poland was a Catholic country it started with an open air Catholic mass. An altar was erected in an open space in the forest, and a priest, Father Kupsz, officiated. The altar was decorated with three large panels. One had a symbolic picture of the Christian faith protected by a Polish soldier. The middle panel showed a Polish eagle. Below it was a crown of thorns surrounding the figures 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, with room left for an additional year or two. The third panel represented a scene of the Nazi horror in Poland.

The most important event of the day was the long march of the entire division, which was preceded by taking the oath. The division was presented with its banner. The banner had a white Polish eagle on a red and white background. It was inscribed in Polish: *Za Ojczyznę i Honor*. This means: For country and Honor. The grandstand was decorated with Polish, Russian, American, British, French, and Czechoslovakian flags,

Our commander Colonel Berling was very military but also very accessible. I had a chance to speak with him on many occasions during our military operations. He was born near Krakow in 1896, so he was just my father's age. During World War One he served in Marshal Pilsudski's Polish Legion and fought successfully against the Russians; so did my father, but he served in the Austrian army and was decorated three times.

Colonel Berling also served on the General Staff of General Anders' army, but disagreed with Anders on his political line. He said that the principal criteria in selecting and mobilizing people into the *Kosciuszko* Division was the man's own

conscience. If he considered himself a Pole, he was accepted. As it turned out the division proved itself worthy of his trust. We distinguished ourselves on the battlefield, we were the first to enter Poland, and we liberated many cities, towns, and villages, including the capitals of Poland and Germany. But the price for all this was not cheap. The cost in lives was very, very high. To my knowledge only two hundred fifty-six soldiers came out without a scratch. Personally, except for losing many of my fellow soldiers and seeing many of the horrors of the war, despite all this it was worthwhile because I was able to help some people out and free them from the evil Nazi regime.

Cities and towns of the U.S.S.R. that our unit fought in as I remember:

Smolensk	Lenino	Orsa	Borisow
Minsk	Baranowice	Kobrin	Brest

Territory of Poland:

Parchew	Wlodowa	River Bug	Chelm
River Wiepszcz	Hrubieszow	Zamosc	Lublin
Lubartow	Deblin	Zeloczow	Siedlce
Minsk-Mazowiecki	Otwock	Modlin	Wolomin
Kalushin	Gura-Kalvarie	Praga-Warshawska	Warsaw
Plock	Wloclawek	Torun	Chelmno
Bydgoszcz	Chemze	Grudziodz	

Territory of German Pomeria:

Zlotow	Jastrow	Rediretz	Tempelburg
Markish-Friedland	Falkenburg	Dramburg	Newsttetin
Paulus Dorff	Koslin	Koshalin	Kolberg
Swedvin	Nowgard	Szczecin	Stargard
	and the River Oder		

On the Berlin:

Schwedt	Oberswalde	Oranienburg	Bernau
Furswalde	Wustesen	River Spree	Potsdam
Konings	Brandenburg Gate	Reichstag	

*It was all over. We terminated our stand at Alexander-Platz in Berlin on May
Second at 2 a.m. , 1945*

Medals and Decorations awarded me by the Polish Government

1. Cross for bravery awarded on October 14, 1943 for taking part in bitter fighting in White Russia at the town of Lenino near the city of Smolensk.
2. Silver Medal *Virtuti Military* in the Field of Glory for volunteering on a dangerous mission crossing the River Wisla in September 1944.
3. Special medal for liberating Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, on January 18, 1945.
4. For participation in freeing the Polish Capital of Warsaw, medal given by Marshal Stalin of the Soviet Union, January 1945.
5. Cross for Bravery and Gallantry in the Field of Glory, March 1945 for destroying two Tiger Tanks in Western Pomeria (Prussia).
6. Medal for Decisive Military Action over the German Rivers Oder and Neisse and the Baltic coast in Eastern Pomeria.
7. Cross for taking part in decisive hand to hand combat in the capital city of Berlin for twelve days and nights, including the Reichstag, May 2, 1945.
8. Medal from Marshal Stalin for taking part in defeating the German army in Berlin, May 2, 1945.
9. Victory over Germany, May 1945.

Plus many participating ribbons
and certificates

This certificate No. 5-91-L was issued originally to me at my bedside in a field hospital in October 1943 near the city of Smolensk in the Soviet Union.

Cross for bravery in the town of Lenino in the Soviet Union.

At the end of the war in 1945 only a handful of soldiers from the First Polish Division were the proud holders of it.

This certificate is signed and presented to me by the President of Poland, Mr. Lech Walesa.

RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA

POSTANOWIENIEM

z dnia 18 września 1991 r.

Pan SZTORCH

Bernard

odznaczony/a został/a

LEGITYMACJA

Nr 5-91 L

KRZYŻEM

BITWY POD LENINO

WARSZAWA

PREZYDENT
RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ POLSKIEJ

dnia 18 września 1991 r.

Lech Walesa

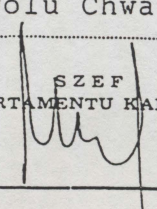
Certificate No. 224

Silver Medal in the Field of Glory

VIRTUTI MILITARY

For action taken in August 1944 on the right bank of the River Wisla
City of Praga - Warszawska Poland

<p style="text-align: center;">ZAŚWIADCZENIE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nr <u>DK-224</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">WARSZAWA</p> <p>data <u>23.11.1993 r.</u></p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Zaświadcza się, że</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pan SZTORCH</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bernard</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">za udział w walkach</p> <p>w szeregach <u>Wojska</u></p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Polskiego</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">został(a) odznaczony (a)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Srebrny Medal Zasłużonym</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Na Polu Chwały</p> <p>.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">S Z E F</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DEPARTAMENTU KADR MON</p> <p>M. p. </p>

Certificate No. 7877 issued to me on October 26, 1945 by the Minister of Defense of the Polish Army.

This distinguished medal was awarded to me for taking part in freeing the capital city of Warsaw from the German occupation on January 18, 1945. It is signed by the Chief of the Polish Defense Forces.

POLSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA LUDOWA

LEGITYMACJA Nr 7877

Warszawa, dnia 31.07. 19 91.

Na podstawie Dekretu Prezydium Krajowej Rady Narodowej z dnia 26 października 1945 r. o ustanowieniu „Medalu za Warszawę”

MINISTER OBRONY NARODOWEJ


nadal

Ob. SZTORCH Bernard

s. Hermana

„MEDAL ZA WARSZAWĘ”

SEKRETARZ DEPARTAMENTU KADR
MINISTERSTWA OBRONY NARODOWEJ



Śmierć najeźdźcom niemieckim!

Niech żyje Wolna, Demokratyczna Polska!

Uczestnikowi walk o wyzwolenie spod jarzma niemieckiego
przedmieścia Warszawy — PRAGI

BERNARD SZTORCH kan.

(imię, nazwisko, stopień wojskowy)

Wyciąg z rozkazu № 25

Naczelnego Dowódcy W. P.
gen. broni Michała Roli-Żymierskiego
z dnia 15. 10. 1944 r.

»Wyrażam podziękowanie oficerom, podofice-
rom i żołnierzom Dywizji
im. Tadeusza Kościuszki
i stawiam ich za wzór całemu Wojsku Polskiemu«

Wrzesień 1944 r.

D-ca jednostki

S. Roli-Żymierski

Wyciąg z rozkazu

Wodza Naczelnego Armii Czerwonej
Marszałka Józefa Stalina
z dnia 14. 10. 1944 r.

»Za świetne działania wojenne wyrażam
wdzięczność formacjom
1 Armii Polskiej,
które brały udział w oswobodzeniu Pragi«



*Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders*

*To the participants in the military action and
freeing of this suburb of the city of Warsaw*

Praga

from the German invaders

Bernard Storch Kap.

*From Order Number 25 by the commander of the
Polish army*

General Michael Roli Zymierski

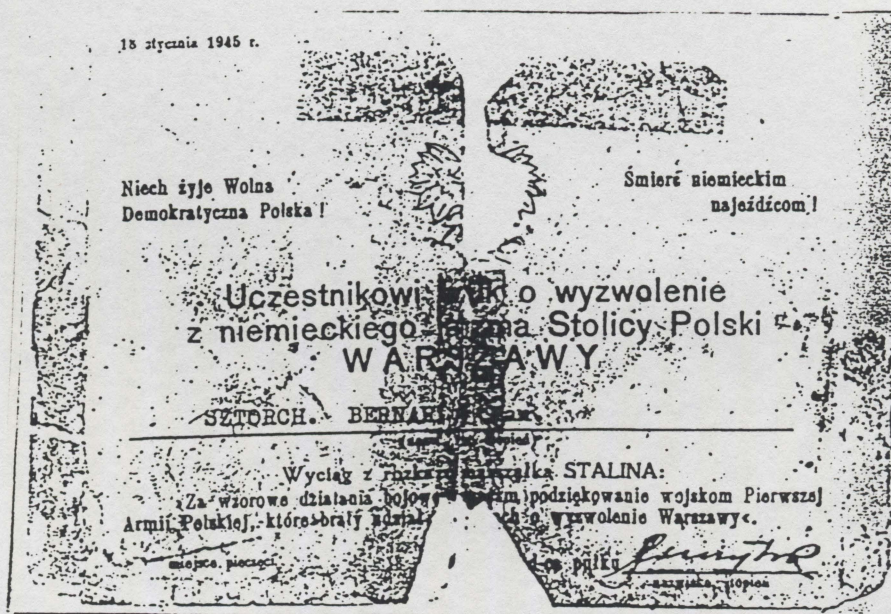
15 October 1944

*I thank the officers and soldiers of the
First Division named Tadeusz Kosciuszko
for setting an example to the whole
Polish Army*

*October 1944
Battery Commander
Captain J. Roskow*

Round Stamp

Special Medal from the U.S.S.R.
for participation in the
liberation of the Polish capital city of
Warsaw
January 18, 1945



18 January 1945

*Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders*

*To the active participants who took part
in freeing the Polish Capital*

Warsaw

Sztorch Bernard Kap.

By the order of Marshal Stalin

*For active military participation by the
First Polish Army
and the bravery of its soldiers
my sincere thanks to you who took part in
freeing the city of Warsaw*

*Commander of First Artillery Regiment
Colonel Guretzki*

Round stamp

Certificate No. 224-D
Cross for Bravery and Gallantry
in the Field of Glory
March 25, 1945
vicinity of Markish-Friedland, East Prussia
Germany

ZAŚWIADCZENIE

Nr DK-224-6

WARSZAWA
data 23.11.1993 r.

Zaświadcza się, że
Pan SZTORCH

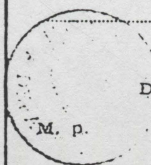
Bernard

za udział w walkach
w szeregach Wojska

Polskiego

został(a) odznaczony(a)

Krzyżem Walecznych



SZEF
DEPARTAMENTU KADR MON

Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders

Order given on 11 February 1945


by the Commander-in-chief of the Red Army
Marshal Stalin
expresses to you

Sztorch Bernard Kap.

I thank you for taking part in the victory
over the cities of
Zlotow, Jastrow, Rederitz, Frydland-Pomerski,
and many other cities and towns in
Eastern Pomeria

Commander of First Artillery Regiment
Colonel Guretzki

15 February 1945

Niech żyje Wolna Demokratyczna Polska!		Śmierć niemieckim na jeźdźcom!
Rozkazem z dnia 11 lutego 1945 r. Naczelný Wódz Armii Czerwonej, Marszałek Stalin, wraża Wam		
SZTORCH. BERNARD. Kap.		
(nazw., imię stopień)		
podziękowanie za udział w walkach o zdobycie miast: Złotów, Jastrów, Rederitz, Frydland Pomorski i innych miejscowości Zachodniego Pomorza		
miejsce pieczęci	d-ca pułku	 nazwisko, stopień
15 lutego 1945 r.		

Niech żyje Wolna
Demokratyczna Polska!



Śmierć niemieckim
najeźdźcom!

Uczestnikowi walk o zdobycie miast Zachodniego Pomorza:
TEMPELBURG, FALKENBURG, DRAMBURG

SZTORCH. BERNARD. Kan.

(Nazwisko, imię, stopień wojskowy)

**Wyciąg z rozkazu Marszałka JÓZEFA STALINA
z dnia 4 marca 1945 r.**

»Za świetne działanie wojenne wyrażam wdzięczność dzielnym wojskom 1-ej Polskiej Armii, które przerwały obronę niemiecką na wschód od Stargardu i zdobyły miasta Tempelburg, Falke. rg, Dramburg«. W dowód uznania dla wojska 1-go Białoruskiego Frontu oraz 1 Armii Polskiej, w Moskwie oddano 4 marca 1945 r. 20 artyleryjskich salw z 224 dział.

Marzec, 1945 r.

D-ca jednostki:

(Pieczęć)

*Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders*

*To the participants in the victories over
these cities in Eastern Pomeria
Tempelburg, Falkenburg, Dramburg*

Sztorch Bernard Kap.

Order given by Marshal Josef Stalin

4 March 1945

*For a brilliant military victory I am grateful
to the heroic soldiers of the
First Polish Army
for breaking through the German defense lines west
of the city of Stargard and capturing
three important cities:
Tempelburg, Falkenburg, Dramburg*

*In honor of this victory and in the honor of
the First White Russian Front and the
First Polish Army
in Moscow on March 4, 1945 an order was given
for a twenty round salute from 224 artillery cannon salvos.*

*Commander of the First Artillery Regiment
Colonel Guretzki*

February 1945

Round stamp

People's Republic of Poland

Certificate No. 14408

The Ruling National Presidium from October 26, 1945 established a special medal for taking decisive military action over the German river Neisse in Lower Silesia, the river Oder in Pomeria, and the Baltic coast in Eastern Pomeria.

The National Minister of Defense
issued to
Bernard Sztorch
son of Herman

"Medal for Oder, Neisse, and Baltic"

signed by the
National Defense Minister

Warsaw 7, 31, 1991

POLSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA LUDOWA

LEGITYMACJA Nr 14408.....

Warszawa, dnia 31.07. 1991r.

Na podstawie Dekretu Prezydium Krajowej
Rady Narodowej z dnia 26 października
1945 r. o ustanowieniu „Medalu
za Odrę, Nyse, Bałtyk”

MINISTER OBRONY NARODOWEJ


nadal

ob. SZTORCH Bernard.....

s. Hermana.....

„MEDAL ZA ODRE, NYSE,
BAŁTYK”

WZEL DEPARTAMENTU KADR
MINISTERSTWA OBRONY NARODOWEJ



[Handwritten signature]

Maaselnij Dowlad Wejska Polakije
kan. Wroni Roladymierski
WIMINIOB & UZDY

Wynajmuję Sztejn Bernardu kan.

71.2 du. 17.4.41.

Na wasz udział w historycznym sferowaniu prze-
jedziecie 1-oj Armii N. P. rzeki Odra i w prze-
niedzielną noc po granicę Odroczonego Państwa
walekowie na terytorium Niemiec. Jednostki

[illegible]

Zoon Levig de vrye

Quincy

卷之九

*Commander in chief of the
Polish Army
General Michael Roli Zymierski*

Death to the German Invaders

*In the name of the people
to you*

Sztorch Bernard Kap.

*Order Number 71
April 17, 1945*

*Thank you so much for taking part in this
historic action in forcibly crossing the
River Oder
the First Polish Army was instrumental in
establishing the new Polish borders, thus freeing
land whose Polish origin goes back over
four hundred years.
I also thank you for taking part in crossing
the rivers Bug and Wisla and freeing
our capital city Warsaw
and driving the German army out of the
Baltic territory
and for giving a new sense of pride to our country and
our democratic republic which you helped free
from temporary occupation.
We shall march forward to the Poland of tomorrow.
Together with our allies we shall march to victory
over our common German enemy.*

*Regiment Commander
Colonel Guretzki*

*Battery Commander
Major Janowski*

Round stamp

Niech żyje Wolna
Demokratyczna Polska!



Śmierć niemieckim
najeźdźcom!

**Uczestnikowi walk o sforsowanie Odry
i przerwanie obrony Niemców
na jej zachodnim brzegu.**

SZTORCH BERNARD KAN.
.....
nazwisko, imię, stopień

Wyciąg z Rozkazu Marszałka Stalina z dnia 23 kwietnia 1945 r. Nr. 339

«Za wzorowe wykonanie działań bojowych wyrażam podziękowanie wojskom
Pierwszej Armii Polskiej, które brały udział w walkach o sforsowanie Odry
i przerwanie obrony niemieckiej na jej zachodnim brzegu».

24.4. 1945 r.



Dowódca jednostki

Janowski

*Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders*

*To you the participants in breaking the defenses of
the German Army and forcibly crossing the*

River Oder

on her eastern bank.

Sztorch Bernard Kap.

By the order of Marshal Stalin

23 April 1945

Order Number 339

*For the example given by the
First Polish Army.*

*I sincerely express my thanks to you for forcibly
crossing the River Oder and breaking the defense lines
of the German army on the eastern bank of the River Oder.*

April 24, 1945

*Battery Commander
Major Janowski*

Round stamp

*Long Live Free Democratic Poland
Death to the German Invaders*

*To the victors of
Berlin*

*Order Number 359
May 2, 1945*

*by the chief of the Red Army
Marshal Stalin
to you
Sztorch Bernard Kap.*

*Sincerest thanks to you for taking part in the
victory over Germany and the
victory over the city of
Berlin.*

May 2, 1945

Round stamp

*Battery Commander
Major Janowski*

**Niech żyje Wolna
Demokratyczna Polska!**



**Śmierć niemieckim
najeźdźcom!**

**Uczestnikowi walk o okrążenie
BERLINA**

SZTORCH BERNARD KAN.

nazwisko, imię, stopień

Wyciąg z Rozkazu Marszałka Stalina z dnia 25 Kwietnia 1945 r.

«Za wzorowe wykonanie zadań bojowych wyrażam podziękowanie wojskom
Pierwszej Armii Polskiej, które brały udział w walkach o okrążenie Berlina».

25 kwietnia 1945 r.



Dowódca jednostki

Janowski

People's Republic of Poland

Certificate No. 125879

The Polish National Ministry of Defense
Article One of April 21, 1966 states that
a medal be given to
Bernard Sztorch
son of Herman
for taking part in the heroic and decisive battle
for the German capital, Berlin

Warsaw 7, 31, 1991

Signed by
National Defense Minister

POLSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA LUDOWA

LEGITYMACJA Nr 125879

Warszawa, data 1991-07-31

MINISTERSTWO OBRONY NARODOWEJ

Na podstawie art. 1 ust. 3 ustawy z dnia
21 kwietnia 1966 r.

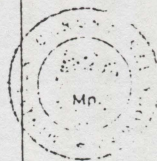
nadaje

Ob. SZTORCH Bernard

s. Hermana

MEDAL ZA UDZIAŁ W WALKACH O BERLIN

MINISTER OBRONY NARODOWEJ



People's Republic of Poland

Certificate No. 234738

The Ruling National Presidium
from October 26, 1945
established a medal for
Victory and Independence

The National Minister of Defense
issued to
Bernard Sztorch
son of Herman
on the day of May 9, 1945

Medal Victory and Independence 1945

Warsaw 7, 2, 1992

Signed by
National Defense Minister

POLSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA LUDOWA

LEGITYMACJA Nr 234738

Warszawa, data 1992-07-02

Na podstawie Dekretu Prezydium Krajowej
Rady Narodowej z dnia 26 października
1945 r. o ustanowieniu „Medalu
Zwycięstwa i Wolności 1945 r.”

MINISTER OBRONY NARODOWEJ

nadal


Ob. SZTORCH Bernard

s. Hermana

dnia 9 maja 1945 r.

„MEDAL ZWYCIĘSTWA
I WOLNOŚCI 1945 r.”

SZEF DEPARTAMENTU KADR
MINISTERSTWA OBRONY NARODOWEJ



Bernhard Storch, 1997



NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN
JEWISH
MILITARY
HISTORY®



CROSS FOR
BRAVERY
AND
GALLANTRY
IN THE
FIELD
OF GLORY
FEBRUARY 1945
EAST PRUSSIA
GERMANY

SILVER MEDAL
IN THE
FIELD OF GLORY
FOR ACTION TAKEN
PLACE
AUGUST 1944
ON THE RIGHT BANK
OF RIVER WISLA
CITY OF
PRAGA--WARSZAWSKA
POLAND

DANE HANSEN PRODUCTIONS

May 31, 1994

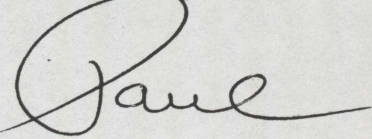
Dear Mr. Storch,

Greetings! Please find enclosed a copy of WE WERE THERE: JEWISH LIBERATORS OF THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS. I hope you enjoy it. It premiered here in Colorado to a packed house during Holocaust Awareness Week.

The good news is that PBS is considering showing the program. The bad news is that I went way over budget and into debt producing the program. As a result, I have no funds left to market the program. If you like the program, please help by telling others. Mort Horvitz is helping to spread the word, and as a result of his efforts we may soon have the tape in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Thanks so much for the great job you did in the interview. I am very proud of this program and believe it will make a difference. Feel free to call me at any time if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Hansen
Producer

pjh/sb
enc.

Nucleus Productions Limited

Bernhard Storch

PII Redacted

14th October 1994

Dear Bernhard,

I do hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to tell you about the outcome of our film on the Liberation of the camps which is now almost complete. Channel 4 will broadcast the film here in the UK in the spring of next year and the Discovery Channel at approximately the same time in the United States.

This brings me to tell you that we have indeed included excerpts from your excellent interview in the final programme. I'm so glad we were able to record your important testimony about discovering Majdanek. In fact we begin the film with your account - so many thanks.

You might like to know as well that I shall be depositing all the interviews at the Imperial War Museum, here in London, which is our most prestigious archive for war memorabilia. The archive is constantly being called on by historians, researchers and archivists.

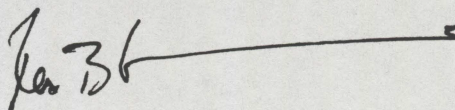
I will of course let you know the date and time of transmission of the programme as soon as it is confirmed. I will also try to arrange a series of special screenings in different American cities before the programme is shown if it is financially feasible and there is enough interest.

May I thank you for all your co-operation and warmest regards to you and your wife.

I enclose your photograph with this letter.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Rex Bloomstein

Name: Bernhard Storch

Address:

PII Redacted

Telephone:

Date of Birth: November 10, 1920

Place of Birth: Bochnia, Poland (33k west of Cracow)

This biography was requested
and faxed to the White House
July 27, 1994 for the upcoming
trip by Vice President
Al Gore
to Warsaw Poland

On September 1, 1939, while apprenticing in my profession and residing with my uncle and his family in Upper Silesia, in the city of Chorow, just 3.5 k from the German border, war erupted between Germany and Poland. Since my uncle and his family were on vacation, I decided to depart Chorow and return home to my mother and 3 younger brothers who were 13, 11, and 7 and a half. My father died in August, 1937 at the age of 43. He was a World War I hero and served in Poland with the Austrian Army. He was decorated three times. The 110k trip home took my past the then insignificant city of Auschwitz.

My mother urged me to go to a safer place with her two brothers near the River Wisla. I intended to return home when the war ended, little knowing that this would be the last time I would see my family.

After wandering for two weeks, under constant bombardment from the German Air Force, I found myself in western Poland in the city of Lvov. In the third week, the U.S.S.R. declared war on Poland, and by September 27, 1939, the war ended. I was stranded there without my family and clothes, and with no future insight, with the very hard winter approaching fast.

In May, 1940, without warning, the Russian NKVD or secret police, entered my room in the middle of the night and took me and all others to a secluded railroad stop. They loaded us into a transport railroad car and I was on the way to an unknown destination. After three weeks, I found myself deep in Siberia with nothing to see but tremendous forests and dilapidated houses without running water or electricity. I was some 300k from the Ural Mountains, guarded by the NKVD. My job was to clear the forest in this severe weather.

On June 22, 1941, war erupted between Germany and Russia. Shortly after, a treaty was signed by the United States, Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. As a result, all Polish citizens were freed from the Russian slave labor camps. We had no idea where to go in this strange country. We had no maps, clothing, food or money.

At some point, I found out that the Polish Army was being organized in Central Asia near the city of Tashkent. After extensive travel, without accommodations, I reached the recruitment point, but it was too late. In November, 1942, I was notified by the Polish authority that a volunteer First Division would be forming in Central Russia. I sent my application and In March, 1943, I was notified to report.

I enlisted in the First Polish Division. I was assigned to a Mortar Company as a gunner. On September 1, 1943, I was ordered to the front line, some 65k away. On October 12, 1943, I had my maiden encounter against the German Army. We advanced 5k with heavy losses in my unit. For the first time in my short military career, I was awarded a Cross for Bravery by my commander.

After being discharged from the field hospital in November, 1943, I was assigned to the First Artillery Regiment as a gunner in charge of a Howitzer cannon. From that day on, I fought the German Army through all of White Russia, the entire length of Central Poland, including the capital city of Warsaw, and ended just a few blocks past the Reichstag in Berlin.

Name: Bernhard Storch

Address:

PII Redacted

Telephone:

Date of Birth: November 10, 1920

Place of Birth: Bochnia, Poland (33k west of Cracow)

I helped to liberate Concentration Camps SOBIBOR on July 22, 1944, and MAJDANEK on July 23, 1944. Majdanek was near the city of Lubin. We had no knowledge or warning of the unforgettable, shocking, devastating sight. We had no idea what had gone on there. Next came the first Death Camp in Poland in Western Pomerania, CHELMNO.

After our final offensive on April 16, across the River Oder in Germany, into the city of Oranienburg, we entered the Concentration Camp of SCHSENCHAUSEN. Thousands of victims were still alive in shocking condition. After seeing what I had to this point, my hope of seeing my family again had dwindled away. This camp was located only 35k from Berlin. I fought there for twelve days in hand to hand combat which finally ended on May 2, 1945 at 2 AM.

Then, it was time to go home, but for me there was nobody there. I lost them all, my entire family, including my mother, brothers, grandparents, relatives, friends, and schoolmates. Even my father's tombstone was removed from his grave site.

I was discharged from the army in September, 1945 and married my wife Ruth on November 18, 1945. We left Poland in the Spring of 1946 and came to the United States in April, 1947. We have two children and three grandchildren.

I was decorated seven times and honored at the Polish Consulate in New York in 1992, 1993, and on April 19, 1994 I was presented with the Cross for Bravery and Gallantry in the Field of Glory. All of these medals were sent to me by the Polish President, Lech Walensa.

I am very involved in community volunteer work. I am a charter member of the New City Jewish Center, member of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, past Post Commander Post #756, Senior Vice Commander of Rockland-Orange District Council JWV, Department of New York Executive Committee JWV, member of the Holocaust Museums in Spring Valley, NY and Washington, DC. I lecture on the Jewish Resistance in Europe, especially in Poland, and on the atrocities I have seen committed by Nazi Germany during World War II on the Jewish and Gentile populations of Europe.

Al Gore
Vice President of the U.S.A.
White House
Washington DC 20050

Cape May Aug.6.1994

Dear Sir,

I am very sorry to have missed the trip with You to Poland on Saturday July 30, 1994.

On July 26,1994 I received a telephone call on behalf of the White House from Miss Amy Zissok requesting from me a short biography. In all seriousness I ask her is this a joke,she replied no but it is very important Miss Zissok did not reviled for what purpose it was.

I Faxed the biography Tuesday July 27, 1994 to Miss Zissok, and the White House Address.

I had no idea then that it was for the upcoming trip to Poland. My own vacation was scheduled for Friday July 29.1994, and I left that morning at 10:30 AM for Cape May NJ

At about 8 PM on Friday July 29, I received a telephone call from the Presidential Office by Miss Weiskoff very apologetic and sincere, that I was included in the delegation.

It would have been a great honor to be with You Sir and to represent our Country the United States of America.

Having been born in Poland, and having lost the entire family during World War Two to the Nazi Concentration Camps of Aushwitz and Belzec, having volunteered to serve in the Polish Army during World War Two, involved in liberating four Concentration Camps Three in Poland and One in Germany just 35 Miles from Berlin, having received thru President of Poland Mr. Lech Walesa Six Medals among them Three Crosses, the latest one on April 17, 1994 at the Polish Consulate in New York City, a Cross for Bravery and Gallantry in the Field of Glory awarded me on March 1945 in East Prussia Germany, it would have been my greatest honor to be there with You Sir and to honor all fallen Civilians and Soldiers during this terrible War.

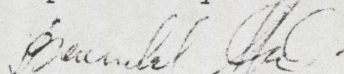
I am very sorry for the missed communication if I had been notified as late as Friday morning on July 29, I would have canceled my vacation and joined You Sir.It was impossible for me to drive back to New City N.Y. and be on time for the 9 P.M. departure on Saturday July 30 from Washington.

I am sincerely grateful to You Sir for inviting me and for representing Our Country so well,and working so hard for Peace Democracy and Justice on our behalf.Please dont hesitate to call on me when time arrives.

Bernhard Storch

PII Redacted

Respectively Yours



Bernhard Storch



THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

September 21, 1994

Mr. Bernhard Storch

PII Redacted

Dear Mr. Storch:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding my visit last month to Warsaw, Poland, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising. Most of all, thank you for the important role that you played in liberating the concentration camps and saving so many lives years ago. I was saddened to read that your family was not saved.

In addition, I very much regret that you were unable to join me on my trip to Poland. Unfortunately, the details of the trip were not confirmed until late Friday--the reason for the late call--and so, of course, there were others like yourself who could not participate in this historic trip.

I was honored to have the opportunity to join in commemorating the deceased as well as the survivors of the gallant fight against the tyranny of the Nazi Wehrmacht. While we will forever be indebted to those courageous freedom fighters for their heroism and sacrifice, the ceremony also served as a time for putting past hostilities aside and instead forging a world in which our children can live without fear or hatred. It was for this that the Polish fighters of 1944 died--for liberty and for human dignity for themselves and for generations to come.

I am sure that you share this Administration's desire to see a Poland in which tolerance, mutual forgiveness, and hope preside and in which all Polish citizens can dwell together in peace.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful letter.

Sincerely,

Al Gore

AG\kkw

Memories from August 1944, as I remember them Aug.1,1994

This is my own account and not any political view because I was a frontline soldier in the First Polish Division, and my only objective was to free Poland from the Nazi occupation, and get reunited with my family which I had not seen since September 3, 1939.

Let me retract to the beginning of the year mainly February 1944 some where on the front positions in White Russia. As I recall winter that year was very brutal with enormous snow fall bitter cold and wind. We had to maintain our roads open, and maintain them 24 hours with shifts from each outfit and clear the snow manually with wide wooden shovels, at the same time keep our enemy on guard with steady artillery bombardment. As I remember at the end of March 1944 our offensive had began with slow moving progress with heavy losses to men power and equipment, discovering on the way enormous atrocities committed on the civilian population in that area of White Russia I did not know if they were single out by association or raise none of mass graves had Crosses nor Star of David. As a front line soldier your objective is to get to your assigned destination, with one think in mind trust ahead and stay alive, concentrate and remember what you had seen.

And after three months of agony and sadness I have reached the pre-1939 Polish Borders. In Sep.1939 after 27, days Poland lost its War to Germany and Soviet Union. Poland was divided once more by the occupying powers. Those territories changed hands each time war erupted. By the time the Second world war ended , the Soviet Union had no intention of giving this territory back to Poland. Instead she divided Germany from Upper Silesia, and Lower East and West Prussia-or Pomaria all the way to the Baltic sea from Gdansk-Kolberg-to Szczecin naming it the Nice--Oder Line which in actuality is much larger and richer in raw material and farm land.

Now, Poland is a free Country but animosities are continued by the Poles from within and from abroad instead get going its economy and its future. Poland had gained more then they had lost. There are about 3000 Jews living now in Poland, but some Poles think that ^{THEY} have 3½ millions of them. So the bitter conflict between the Ukraine, White Russia and Poland will continue.

I will continue with the military operations as I remember from early summer 1944. After bitter fighting with the enemy by my regiment and the rest of the division we successfully crossed a major obstacle river "Bug" with enormous casualties.

Germans had hoped to hold their positions on the opposite site of the river and we had no choice but to pursue the enemy. After liberating a hutch amount of territories from the enemy our objectives were to occupy a large city the Capital of this region City Lublin, known to Jews thru out the world as the cradle of Jewish learnings. I will not go into the Two Concentration Camps liberated here, I talk about then in this book in previous pages.

We occupied the City July 23rd.1944. I had not seen such destruction of human lives, horses and equipment like on this frontline. . From that day on we continued liberating Towns Cities Villagers, and people in them inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. As I recall we had reached the outskirts of Warsaw middle of August.1944, Praga-Warszawska on the Right Bank of River Wisla, with bitter resistance by the enemy, My, Lt.suffered multiple shrapnel wounds, one of my men lost a leg, my protective cannon shield was heavily damaged the vital instruments and my head were OK.Our unit had no fatalities thank God.

There were so many dead soldiers that each unit had to help to dispose of the bodies very painful task indeed to avoid all kinds epidemics in this heat of August.

While the liberation of Poland continued, we had received a look warm reception from the local population. While the temporary pause in action continued thru the Holidays until of the 16,of January 1945 I had privilege to meet local people and try to find out why this cold treatment our men are receiving. I also came across one Jewish family of three who survived the Warsaw Ghetto and were living in the area. They blamed the outcome of the Ghetto uprising on people outside the walls and to a great degree on the must active and well organized fighting resistance group in Poland the AK- Armja Krajowa- the Home Army.

Unfortunately Jews were not admitted in their ranks except in few instances of not being recognized as Jews, and the population were fed false accusations that the First Polish Army are full of Communists in Polish uniforms. Which naturally was the biggest lie to my knowledge.

If the same group of leaders would have given a helping hand to the Jewish resistance in the Ghetto and elsewhere Hitler would have never succeed in Poland with the Final Solution. The sad story is that many of the Jewish resistance fighters accosted in the forest by the members of the AK lost their lives on the spot. It is were hard to understand this, especially when booth groups were hunted by the Germans. Those stories were told me by the surviving family, and by a honest christian in the late part of 1944.

The AK, accused the Polish Army fighting on the Eastern Front, as being communist, at the same time the same Polish soldiers who served on the Western Front were the good guys and real Poles, not saying or mentioning that both groups were interned in Siberian labor camps not by their own choice, and in many cases do to sudden exit families were split, and never reunited again, and this is the sad part.

When the Polish Army started to organized in the USSR in 1941-42, all of us were released after the USSR, United States and Great Britain entered into a agreement or pact after war erupted in June 22, 1941. There were about 200Q000 Poles in the labor camp including P.O.W. and Jews. a small percentage. In the late summer of 1941 it was decided by the Polish Exiles in London to form a Polish military force in the USSR, and fight the nazis on both fronts, with the starting with the Eastern front. The war situation look very grim for the Russians in 1941. This agreement was sign between Gen. Wladislaw Sikorski and Josef Stalin, with the agreement of Churchil and Roosevelt.

In Russia Gen. Wladislaw Anders was put in charge of the division forming near city Saratov on the Volga river some 200 miles from Stalingrad. Gen. Anders one of the high officers who survived the "Katin" massacre of thousands Polish POW officers by the Russians in 1940 near Smolensk.

Polish people descended from all over to enlist and join the Army, but first we had to get some food to get on our feet, none of us was really ready for military training, and this process was were slow. The time table was set, but Gen. Anders could not deliver his troops on time, and he arrived to the conclusion that one division will not do the job right, and there were just to many Poles in the camp to be processed. By the time I have reached this area, the army had moved to Central Asia near Tashkent.

Except for military there were no passenger trains availably no provisions or accommodations provided you were on your own, and knowing nothing about this strange country we simply followed the crowd and finding thinks out on the way. Meanwhile by the Spring of 1942 over 70.000 soldiers and families left the Soviet Union to Iran, by the summer over 40.000 had left, none were assigned to the Eastern Front, among them who had left was The late Menachim Begin. I was by then accepted, but Stalin put a stop to it, because none of the recruits reached the Eastern Front. There were many families split by that development, and newer reunited again. It was estimated that about 110-or 140.000 people departed, and about 1.860000 were left behind at the mercy of the Soviets and no future insight.

Among who did not want to leave his people was Col. Zigmunt Berling he was on Gen Anders Staff, professional Officer who spend time with Anders at the POW camp, and released to be saved from Katin Forest Tragedy in 1940.

At this point I will describe the events between July 27, 1944 and July 30, 1994.

July 27, at about 11:50 A.M. telephone rang in my home and the party on the line ask to speak to me introducing her self as Amy Zissok from the Presidential Office.

After this short introduction she requested from me a short biography, and if possible to be Faxed to the White House in C/O Amy Zissok Washington D.C. 20050. Momentarily I was shock and almost put the receiver down then I ask is this some kind of a joke, she persisted no it is of outmost importance, I replied that I do not have a Fax stalling for time, I said that it will be mailed to her next day. Then I ask were did you got my telephone number, she replied from J.W.V. in Washington not telling for what purpose this Bio. is needed, just insisting it is very important. I assured her that it will in the next day mail.

At 8 PM that night I called Mr. Morton Horvitz, Guest Curator at the National Museum of American Jewish Military Museum in Washington D.C. We talk for a while and then I inform him what had transpired during the day, and he said stop right there, I know all about it, he new that it was about a trip to Poland but no idea when. After the conversation I started to prepare the biography, and was finish by 1;30 A.M. in the morning July 28, 1994

At about 10;00 PM I received a call from the Past National Commander Warren Dolny, who just came from Washington, preparing for the upcoming National Convention in Dallas Tex. Aug. 21--29. He call me Mr. Storch are Your bags pack, not recognizing his voice immediately. Hear I am deep involved in tipping and another prank is calling. being polite as always, I said no but ho are you anyway. One strait answer and I new its time for apology. After talking to him He told me how this came all about, but again there was any date set. The next few days I continued with our vacation plan to leave on Friday July 29, at 10;30 AM, arriving in Cape May at 3;30 that afternoon. From Tuesday on I did not received any communication at all, until at about 8;00 P.M. Friday July 29, from Miss Weiskoff saying that she is calling from the Presidential Office about the upcoming trip by the Vice President Al Gore on Saturday July 30, 1994 from Washington at 9:P.M. Miss Weiskoff was very apologetic and sincere telling me that I am included in the Vice Presidential Party for the General Uprising of August 2 1944 in Warshaw Poland. She talk to me for 10, minutes apologizing over and over. I set to her if I would had received a call that Friday morning, I would have change my plans and go to Washington same day, and it would have been a great honor to be with the Vice President Gore, and to represent the United States, and the Jewish War Veterans.

I repeated to her once more that it would be impossible to drive back to New City, and go back for the 9:00 PM flight we continued our conversation, I pointed out to her, that indeed I was looking forward to this trip to honor all who perished in that dreadful War including my whole family.

Miss Weiskoff apologized once more for the missed communication and we bid sadly good by's. And so it goes in Washington, to many hands, and one does not know what the other is doing.

As it turned out Vice President Gore attended the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising on August 1, 1944 by the Home Army known in Poland by the name of AK-Armja-Krajowa.

The same group that refused Jewish fighters in their Ranks, except for the one not knowing or reviling being Jewish.

The same group who refused help to the Jewish Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943.

The same group who murdered many Jewish Partizans in the Forest in Poland by disarming them first.

The same group who had killed Six Concentration Camp Survivors in late May of 1945 in city Lublin Poland.

The same group who murdered in cold blood one of my soldiers, a devoted Catholic who prayed twice daily an exPOW who received his first pass in June 1945 to see his parents for the first time since 1939, his crime was being a soldier on the Eastern Front, and wearing a Polish Uniform.

Such was the mentality of some Poles, and what chances did a Jew have to survive the War??? Very, Very Sad Indeed...

Nevertheless these statements are my own views and in no shape or form would I have dishonored this solemn ceremony.

I believe in forgiveness. I am here not to judge, each one of us will be judge when time comes.

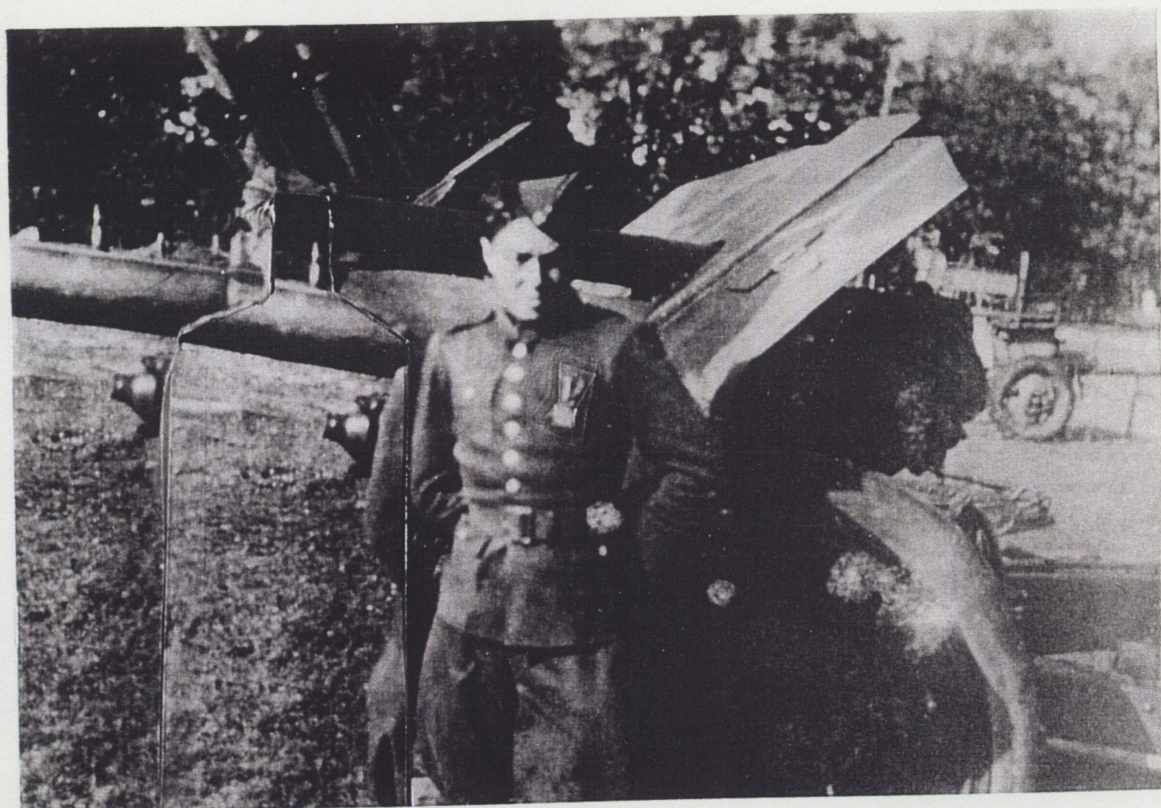
Yes I was disappointed that a mistake was made in Washington, there were too many people involved planning this trip.

I would hope in the future this episode will be remembered, and the White House Staff will take care of their responsibility's.....

Father Herman Storch
Poland, Austria
1917



Bernhard Storch
on the Front Lines of Smolensk U.S.S.R.
November 1943



The Storch Family
June 1937
Bochnia, Poland



November, 18 1995 our 50th wedding Anniversary



Herman Storche's Mother Rachel
Circa 1870



Beuthen.O.S. Germany.1926
the David and Gusta Krause
Family
Children right to left;
Mona,Bertha,front,Ruth,Gunther,
Lower left Esther



Group of Relatives and Friends
Bochnia, Poland
1919

Back row *LEFT*

Sam Lehrfeld, Dawid Lehrfeld, Herman Storch, Cousin Storch
Moniek Lehrfeld, Unknown

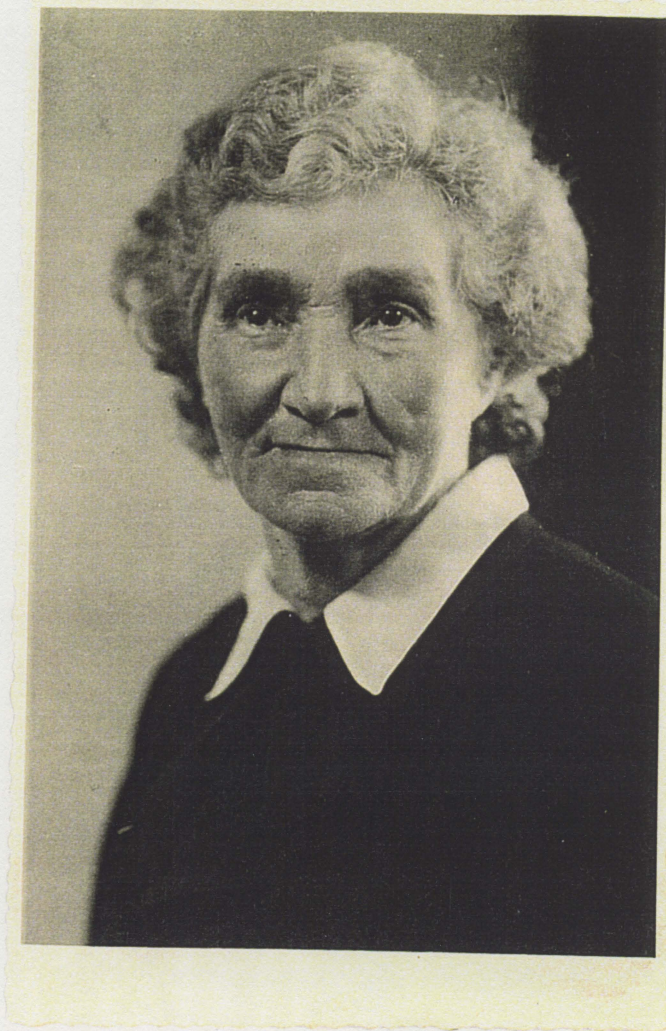
Front row left to right, Unknown, Josef Lustic
Unknown, Max Lehrfeld, Unknown



1910
Chaim Zimbalist
Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, Poland



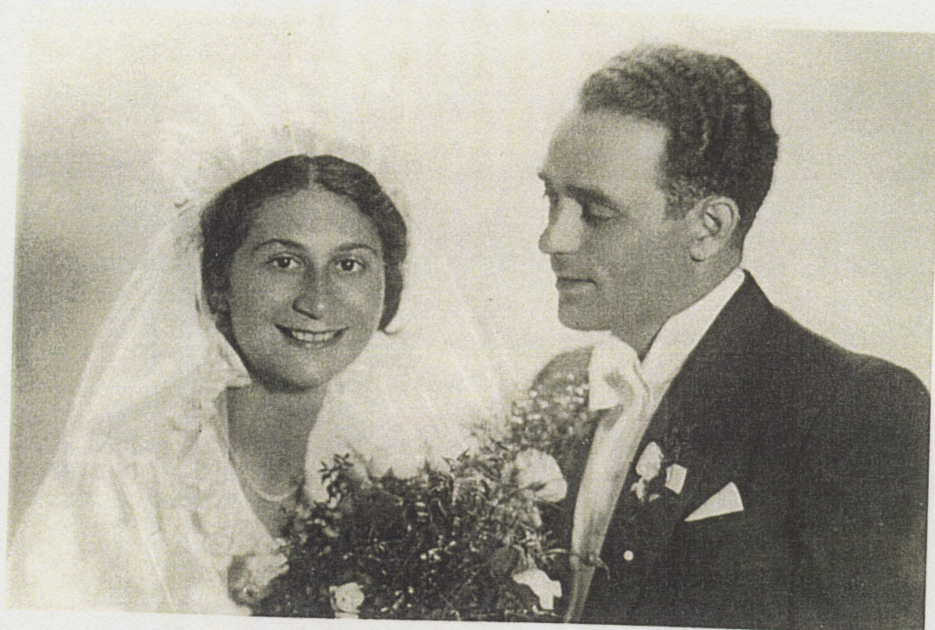
Grandmother, Rachel Lehrfeld
Bochnia, Poland 1937



Malvina, Gershon, and Eve Schlachet
My Fathers Sister
1946



Moniek and Lena Lehrfeld
Chorzow, Poland
1937



Esther and Moniek Glass
Tomaszow-Mazowiecki
Poland 1/3 1941

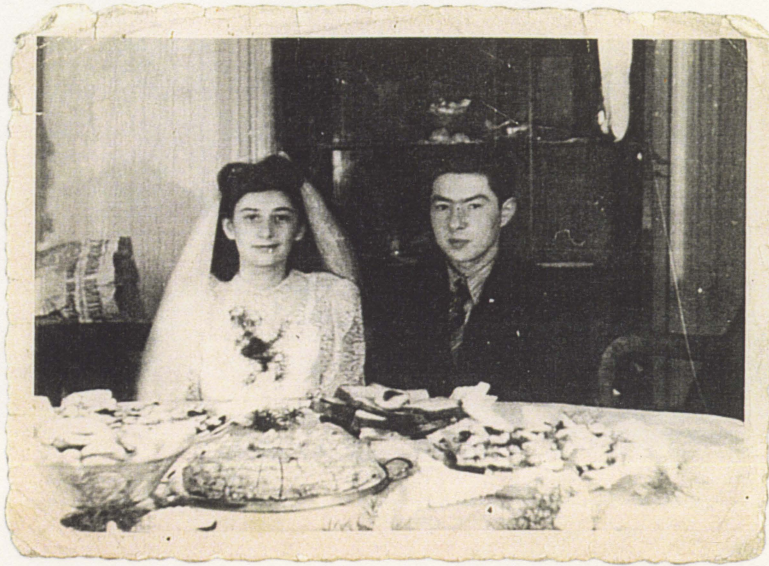




1945



November, 18 1945, Katowitze, Poland
Wedding of Ruth and
Bernhard Storch



David, Ceska Samy Lehrfeld
Katowice, Poland 1945



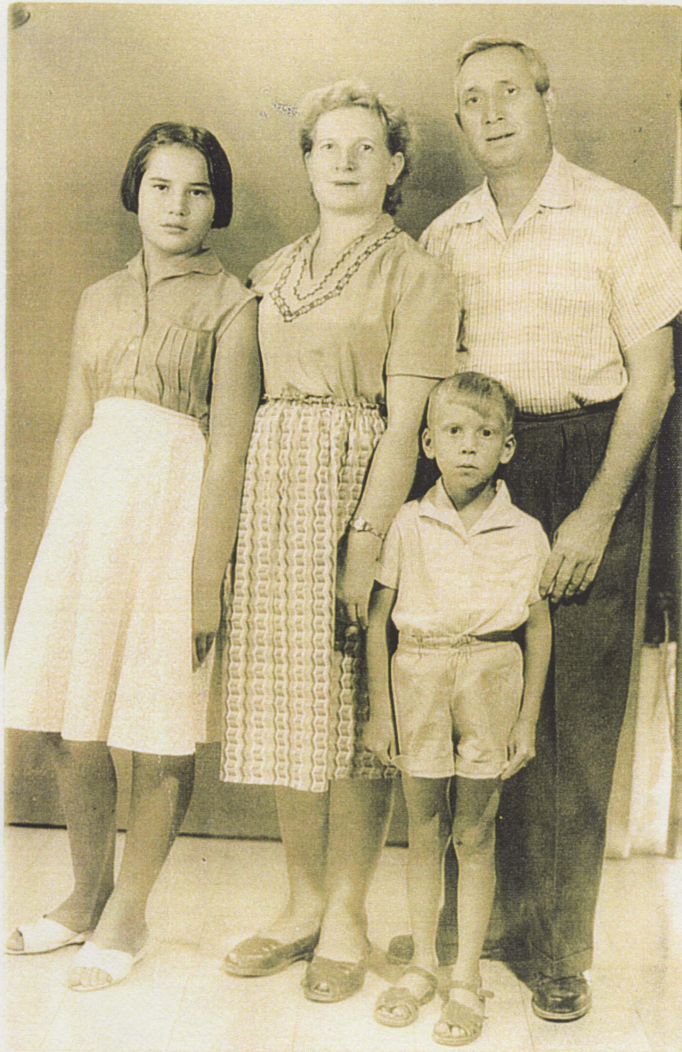
Reunion Israel 1952
of the Szachna Lehrfeld Family



1953
The Mintz Family, Brooklyn, NY
Isidore Mintz
was my Father's twin Brother



Izik Krause, 1960
Jerusalem
Children; Tamara, David



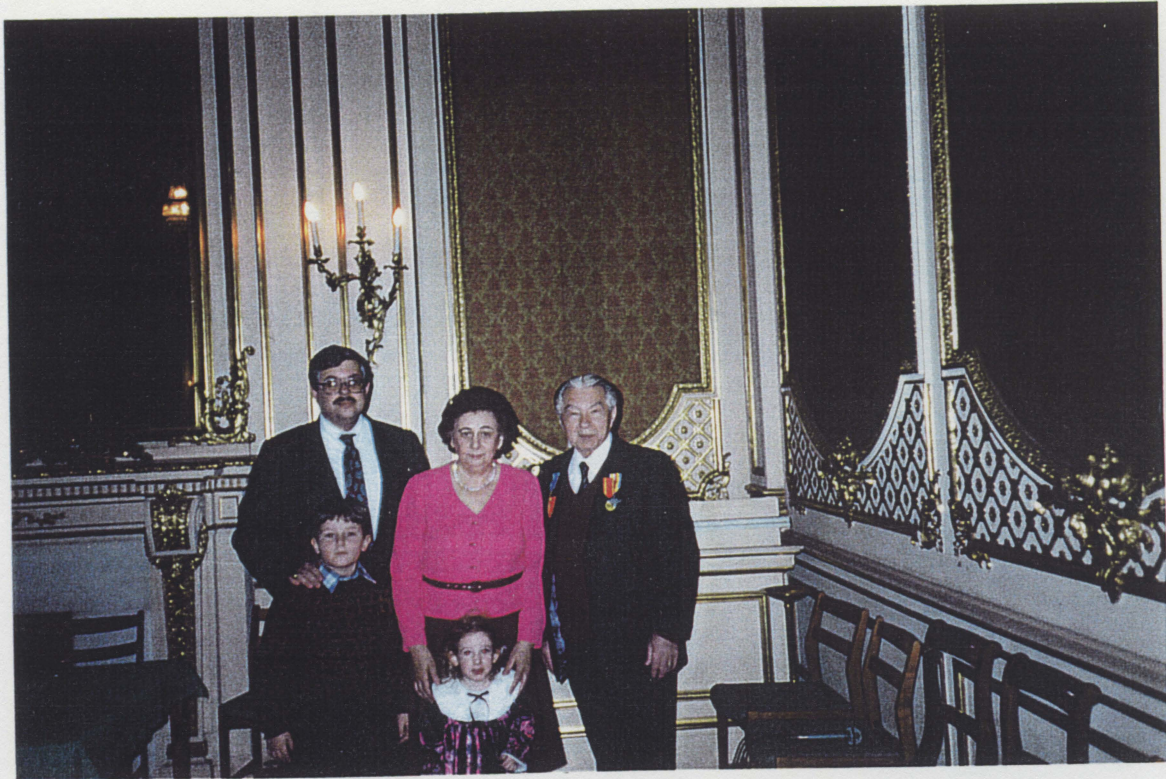
New York City Nov.8,1991
Polish Consulate Receiving Four World War Two Medals
in the center the Gen Counsel Mr.J.Surdykowski



November 8,1991 at the Consulate
Proud and festive occasion



Proud moment at the Polish Consulate
New York, November, 8 1991



Proud Grandson Joshua admiring the Medals
November, 9, 1991



April, 1994

National Museum of American
Jewish Military History
1811 R Street N.W. Washington. D.C.



April 17, 1994
Polish Consulate Receiving the Cross for Bravery
and Gallantry in the Field of Glory



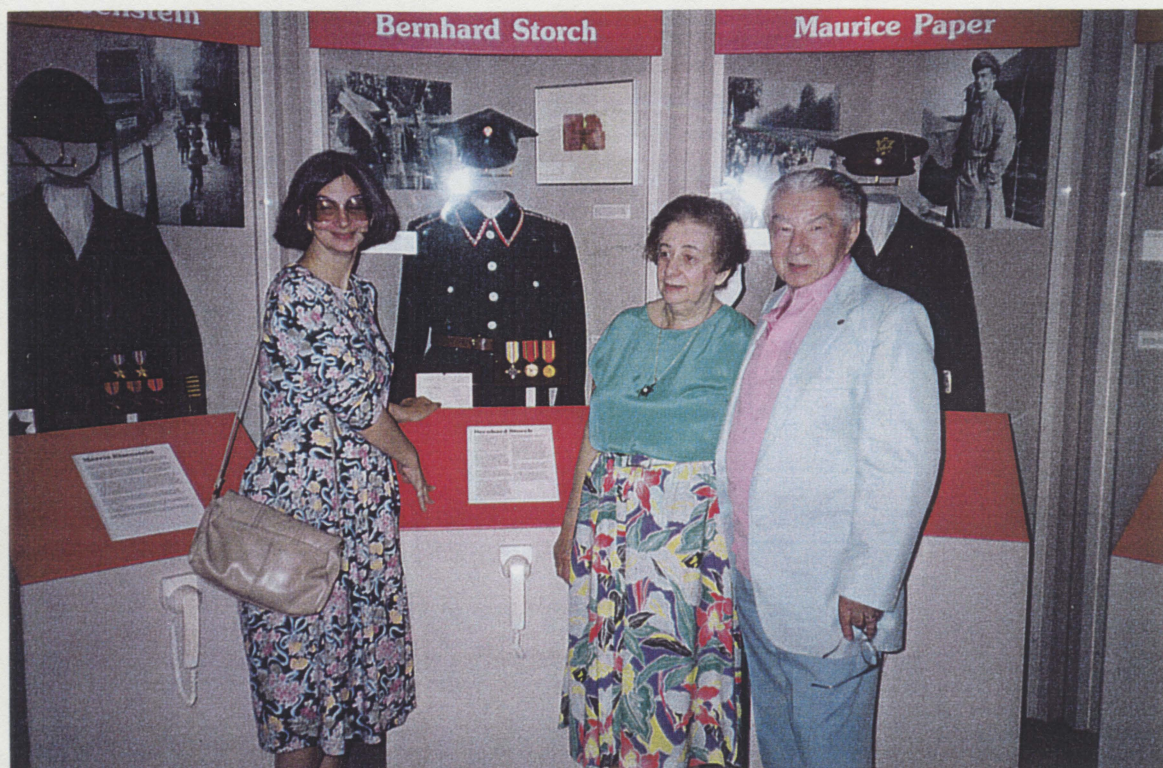
November 1995, 50th. Anniversary
of World War Two New York City



Memorial at the Holocaust Museum
Nov. 1995



June 1996
National Museum of American
Jewish Military History
1811 R Street N.W. Washington, D.C.





Nov. 1943
Smolensk
U.S.S.R.

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